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GUZ 59 James

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - LIX*

David Guzik

David Guziks' Commentary On
59 James
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

Greeting

Jas 1:1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, greeting:

Testing of Your Faith

Jas 1:2 My brothers count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

Jas 1:3 knowing that the proving of your faith works patience.

Jas 1:4 But let patience have its perfective work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Jas 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, who gives to all freely and with no reproach, and it will be given to Him.

Jas 1:6 But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, being driven by wind and being tossed;

Jas 1:7 for do not let that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

Jas 1:8 he is a double-souled man, not dependable in all his ways.

Jas 1:9 But let the lowly brother rejoice in his lifting up;

Jas 1:10 and the rich one rejoice in his humiliation, because he will pass away like the flower of the grass.

Jas 1:11 For the sun rose with the hot wind and dried up the grass, and its flower fell out, and the beauty of its appearance perished; so also the rich one will fade away in his ways. Isa. 40:6, 7

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, because having been approved he will receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to the ones loving Him.

Jas 1:13 Let no one being tempted say, I am tempted from God. For God is not tempted by evils, and He tempts no one.

Jas 1:14 But each one is tempted by his own lusts, having been drawn out and having been seduced by them .

Jas 1:15 Then being conceived, lust brings forth sin. And sin being fully formed brings forth death.

Jas 1:16 Do not go astray, my beloved brothers,

Jas 1:17 every act of good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning.

Jas 1:18 Having purposed, He brought us forth by the word of truth, for us to be a certain firstfruit of His creatures.

Hearing and Doing the Word

Jas 1:19 So that, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

Jas 1:20 For the wrath of man does not work out the righteousness of God.

Jas 1:21 On account of this, having put aside all filthiness and overflowing of evil, in meekness receive the implanted Word being able to save your souls.

Jas 1:22 But become doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Jas 1:23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, this one is like a man studying his natural face in a mirror;

Jas 1:24 for he studied himself, and has gone away, and immediately he forgot of what kind he was.

Jas 1:25 But the one looking into the perfect law of liberty, and continuing in it , this one not having become a forgetful

hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in his doing.

Jas 1:26 If anyone thinks to be religious among you, yet not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his heart, this one's religion is vain.

Jas 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James 1:1-27

James 1 - A Living Faith in Trials and Temptations

A. Trials and wisdom.

1. (1) A Greeting from James.

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

a. **James:** There are several men named **James** mentioned in the New Testament, but reliable tradition assigns this book to the one called *James the Just*, the half-brother of Jesus (Mat 13:55) and the brother of Jude (Jud 1:1), who led the church in Jerusalem (Act 15:13).

i. Other men mentioned in the Bible named **James** include:

- James, brother of John and son of Zebedee, the first apostle martyred and also known as *James the Less* (Mat 10:2, Mar 15:40, Act 12:2).
- James the son of Alphaeus, another of the twelve disciples (Mat 10:3).

- James, the father of the “other” apostle Judas (Luk 6:16).

ii. Yet the writer of this letter is the same James who received a special resurrection appearance of Jesus (1Co 15:7). This was probably the cause of his conversion, because up to that time the brothers of Jesus seemed unsupportive of His message and mission (Joh 7:5).

iii. When he did follow Jesus, he followed with great devotion. An early history of the church says that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large and thick calluses, making them look like the knees of a camel. It also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem by being pushed from a high point of the temple. Yet the fall did not kill him, and on the ground he was beaten to death, even as he prayed for his attackers.

b. A bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: Knowing that this James was the half-brother of Jesus makes his self-introduction all the more significant. He did not proclaim himself “the brother of Jesus” but only **a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Jesus was more than James’ brother; more importantly, Jesus was his **Lord**.

i. **Bondservant** is an important word. It translates the ancient Greek word *doulos*, and is probably better simply translated as *slave*. “A slave, a bondservant, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another... Among the Greeks, with their strong sense of personal freedom, the term carried a degrading connotation.” (Hiebert)

ii. **Lord** is also an important word. It translates the ancient Greek word *kurios*. It simply meant the master of a *doulos*, and in the context it means that

James considered Jesus *God*. "Hellenistic Jews used *Kurios* as a name for God; the non-use of the article gains in significance when it is remembered that *o Kurios*, 'Dominus,' was a title given to the early Roman Emperors in order to express their deity." (Oesterley in *Expositor's*)

c. **To the twelve tribes:** What James meant by this reference to **the twelve tribes** is difficult to understand. The question is whether James wrote a letter to only Christians from a Jewish background or to all Christians. Certainly this letter applies to all Christians; yet James probably wrote his letter before Gentiles were brought into the church, or at least before Gentile Christians appeared in any significant number.

i. **The twelve tribes** is a Jewish figure of speech that sometimes referred to the Jewish people as a whole (Mat 19:28). Paul referred to *our twelve tribes* in his speech before King Agrippa (Act 26:7). The concept of the "twelve tribes" among the Jewish people was still strong, even though they had not lived in their tribal allotments for centuries.

ii. In Gal 2:8-9 Paul described some of the first-century apostles as *the apostleship to the circumcised*; that is to say they had their ministry mainly to the *lost sheep of Israel*, even as Jesus mentioned in Mat 10:6; Mat 15:24. In the same context Paul mentioned this same **James**, so it is fair to also regard him as one having *the apostleship to the circumcised*.

iii. **Which are scattered abroad:** At this time, the Jewish people were scattered all over the world and there was a Christian presence among most Jewish communities throughout the world. Regarding the extent of the dispersion, Josephus wrote: "There is no

city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root.” (Cited in Barclay)

iv. Since this was written for the body of Christians as it existed at that time, this is also a letter for us today. Some think the book of James isn’t important for Christians, and some quote Martin Luther’s famous estimation of James as “a letter full of straw.” But Luther’s remark should be understood in its context. He was sometimes frustrated because those who wanted to promote salvation by works quoted certain verses from James against him. His intention was to observe that there was little or nothing in James that preached the gospel of justification by faith alone. In another place Luther wrote regarding James, “I think highly of the epistle of James, and regard it as valuable... It does not expound human doctrines, but lays much emphasis on God’s law.” (Cited in Barclay)

v. Martin Luther knew and taught exactly what the book of James teaches. The following is from his preface to Romans regarding saving faith: *O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.* (Cited in Moo)

vi. In many ways, we listen to the book of James because it echoes the teaching of Jesus. There are at

least fifteen allusions to the Sermon on the Mount in James. A man who knew the teaching of Jesus and took it seriously wrote this letter.

d. **Greetings:** The salutation **Greetings** was the customary Greek way of opening a letter. Paul never used it; he preferred to salute his readers with the words *grace and peace*. Here James used this more customary salutation.

2. (2-4) *Patient endurance in trials.*

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

a. **Count it all joy when you fall into various trials:** James regarded trials as inevitable. He said **when**, not **if you fall into various trials**. At the same time trials are occasions for **joy**, not discouraged resignation. We can **count it all joy** in the midst of trials because they are used to produce **patience**.

i. Moffatt translated Jas 1:2 as, *Greet it as pure joy*, pointing out a play on word between the *Greetings* at the end of Jas 1:1, and a similar word used to start Jas 1:2. It is "an attempt to bring out the play on words in the original, where the courteous *chairein* (greeting) is echoed by *charan* (joy)."

ii. The older King James Version says, *when ye fall into divers temptations*; but the rendering **trials** in the New King James Version is preferred. The word translated **trials** "signifies affliction, persecution, or *trial* of any kind; and in this sense it is used here, not intending diabolic suggestion, or what is generally understood by the word temptation." (Clarke)

iii. **When you fall into:** “Not go in step by step, but are precipitated, plunged... When ye are so surrounded that there is no escaping them, being distressed, as David was, Psa 116:3.” (Trapp)

iv. **Patience** is the ancient Greek word *hupomone*. This word does not describe a passive waiting but an *active endurance*. It isn’t so much the quality that helps you sit quietly in the doctor’s waiting room, as it is the quality that helps you finish a marathon.

v. The ancient Greek word *hupomone* comes from *hupo* (under) and *meno* (to stay, abide, remain). At its root, it means *to remain under*. It has the picture of someone under a heavy load and choosing to stay there instead of trying to escape. The philosopher Philo called *hupomone* “the queen of virtues.” (Cited in Hiebert) The Greek commentator Oesterley said this word **patience** described “the frame of mind which endures.”

b. **Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience:** Faith is *tested* through trials, not *produced* by trials. Trials reveal what faith we do have; not because God doesn’t know how much faith we have, but so that our faith will be evident to ourselves and to those around us.

i. We notice that it is **faith** that is tested, and it shows that faith is important and precious – because only precious things are tested so thoroughly. “Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body: hence the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace.” (Spurgeon)

ii. If trials do not produce faith, what does? Rom 10:17 tells us: *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*. Supernaturally, faith

is built in us as we hear, understand, and trust in God's word.

iii. James did not want anyone to think that God sends trials to break down or destroy our faith; therefore, he will come back to this point in Jas 1:13-18.

c. **Produces patience:** Trials don't produce faith, but when trials are received with faith, it **produces patience**. Yet **patience** is not *inevitably* produced in times of trial. If difficulties are received in unbelief and grumbling, trials can produce bitterness and discouragement. This is why James exhorted us to **count it all joy**. Counting **it all joy** is faith's response to a time of trial.

i. "It is occasionally asserted that James asks his readers to *enjoy* their trials... He did not say that they must *feel* it all joy, or that trials *are* all joy." (Hiebert)

d. **But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing:** The work of patient endurance comes slowly and must be allowed to have full bloom. Patient endurance is a mark of the person who is **perfect and complete, lacking nothing**.

i. "Patience must not be an inch shorter than the affliction. If the bridge reach but half-way over the brook, we shall have but ill-favoured passage. It is the devil's desire to set us on a hurry." (Trapp)

ii. "These expressions in their present application are by some thought to be borrowed from the Grecian games: the man was *perfect*, who in any of the athletic exercises had got the victory; he was *entire*,

having *everything complete*, who had the victory in the *pentathlon*, in each of the *five* exercises." (Clarke)

iii. Others think that the terms come from the world of sacrifice, where only a potential sacrificial animal that was judged to be **perfect and complete, lacking nothing** was fit to offer God. It meant that the animal had been tested and approved.

iv. "The natural tendency of trouble is not to sanctify, but to induce sin. A man is very apt to become unbelieving under affliction: that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it: that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some ill way of escaping from his difficulty: and that would be sin. Hence we are taught to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation; because trial has in itself a measure of temptation'; and if it were not neutralized by abundant grace it would bear us towards sin." (Spurgeon)

v. Yet, trials can prove a wonderful work of God in us. "I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then, to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then, to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw him then." (Spurgeon)

3. (5-8) *How to receive the wisdom you need from God.*

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

a. **If any of you lacks wisdom:** Trials bring a necessary season to seek **wisdom** from God. We often don't know we need **wisdom** until our time of difficulty. Once in a time of trial, we need to know if a particular trial is something God wants us to eliminate by faith or persevere in by faith. This requires **wisdom**.

i. In trials, we need **wisdom** a lot more than we need *knowledge*. Knowledge is raw information but **wisdom** knows how to use it. Someone once said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, but wisdom is the ability to put things together.

b. **Let him ask of God:** To receive wisdom, we simply **ask of God** - who gives wisdom generously (**liberally**), and without despising our request (**without reproach**).

i. "We are all so ready to go to books, to go to men, to go to ceremonies, to anything except to God... Consequently, the text does not say, 'Let him ask books,' nor 'ask priests,' but, 'let him ask of God.'" (Spurgeon)

ii. God does indeed give **liberally**. "He gives according to his excellent greatness; as Alexander the Great gave a poor man a city; and when he modestly refused it as too great for him, Alexander answered, *Non quaero quid te accipere deceat, sed quid me dare*, The business is not what thou art fit to receive, but what it becometh me to give." (Trapp)

iii. **Without reproach:** "This is added, lest any one should fear to come too often to God... for he is ready ever to add new blessings to former ones, without any end or limitation." (Calvin) Knowing God's generosity - that He never despises or resents us for asking for wisdom - should encourage us to ask Him often. We understand that He is the God of the open hand, not the God of the clenched fist.

iv. When we want wisdom, the place to begin and end is the Bible. True wisdom will always be consistent with God's word.

v. The language here implies humility in coming to God. "It does not say, 'Let him buy of God, let him demand of God, let him earn from God.' Oh! No – 'let him ask of God.' It is the beggar's word. The beggar asks an alms. You are to ask as the beggar asks of you in the street, and God will give to you far more liberally than you give to the poor. You must confess that you have no merit of your own." (Spurgeon)

c. **But let him ask in faith:** Our request for wisdom must be made like any other request - **in faith**, without doubting God's ability or desire to give us His wisdom.

i. We notice that not only must one come in **faith**, but one must also **ask in faith**; and this is where the prayers of many people fail. "You know, dear friends, that there is a way of praying in which you ask for nothing, *and get it.*" (Spurgeon)

d. **With no doubting... let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord:** The one who doubts and lacks faith should not expect to receive **anything from the Lord**. This lack of faith and trust in God also shows that we have no foundation, being **unstable in all our ways**.

i. **Like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind:** "The man who is not thoroughly persuaded that if he ask of God he shall receive, resembles a wave of the sea; he is in a state of continual agitation; driven by the wind, and tossed: now *rising* by *hope*, then *sinking* by *despair.*" (Clarke)

ii. **A wave of the sea** is a fitting description of one who is hindered by unbelief and unnecessary doubts.

- **A wave of the sea** *is without rest*, and so is the doubter.
- **A wave of the sea** *is unstable*, and so is the doubter.
- **A wave of the sea** *is driven by the winds*, and so is the doubter.
- **A wave of the sea** *is capable of great destruction*, and so is the doubter.

e. **A double-minded man, unstable in all his ways:**

To ask God but to ask Him in a doubting way, shows that we are **double-minded**. If we had no faith, we would never ask at all. If we had no unbelief, we would have **no doubting**. To be in the middle ground between faith and unbelief is to be **double-minded**.

i. According to Hiebert, **double-minded** is literally *two-souled*. "The man of two souls, who has one for the earth, and another for heaven: who wishes to secure both worlds; he will not give up earth, and he is loath to let heaven go." (Clarke)

ii. The man who said to Jesus, "*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mar 9:24) was not **double-minded**. He wanted to believe, and declared his belief. His faith was weak, but it wasn't tinged with a **double-minded** doubt.

iii. "Do you believe that God can give you wisdom, and that he will do so if you ask him? Then, go at once to him, and say, 'Lord, this is what I need.' Specify your wants, state your exact condition, lay the whole case before God with as much orderliness as if you were telling your story to an intelligent friend who was willing to hear it, and prepared to help you; and then say, 'Lord, this is specifically what I think I want; and

I ask this of thee believing that thou canst give it to me.” (Spurgeon)

4. (9-11) *Encouragement for those affected by trials.*

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

a. **Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation:** As much as it is appropriate for the **lowly** to rejoice when they are lifted up by God, so it is appropriate (but far more difficult) for the high (**the rich**) to rejoice when they are brought to **humiliation** by trials.

i. “As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals.” (Hiebert, citing Lenski)

ii. Though we can understand the relative poverty and riches as trials or tests of a living faith that a Christian may deal with, it nonetheless seems that James has made a sudden shift in his subject, from trials and wisdom to riches and humility. In some ways, the Book of James is like the Book of Proverbs or other Old Testament wisdom literature, and it can jump from topic to topic and back again to a previous topic.

b. **Because as a flower of the field he will pass away:** Trials serve to remind the rich and the high that though they are comfortable in this life, it is still *only this life*, which fades as the grass grows brown and the flowers fade away.

i. In the land of Israel there are many kinds of beautiful flowers that spring to life when the rains

come, but they last for only a short time before withering away. On the scale of eternity, this is how quickly **the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.**

ii. The riches of this world will certainly **fade away** - but James says that the **rich man also will fade away.** If we put our life and our identity into things that **fade away**, we will **fade away** also. How much better to put our life and our identity into things that will never fade! If a man is only rich in this world, when he dies, he *leaves* his riches. But if a man is rich before God, when he dies, he *goes to* his riches.

B. Living for the Lord in times of temptation.

1. (12) *A blessing for those who endure temptation.*

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

a. **Blessed is the man:** This sounds like one of Jesus' Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:1-12). In those great statements of blessing, Jesus did not tell us the *only* ways we can be **blessed**. Here we learn we can be **blessed** as we endure **temptation**.

i. It does not say, "Blessed is the man who is never tempted." Nor does it say, "Blessed is the man who finds all temptation easy to conquer." Instead the promise of blessedness is given to the one who **endures temptation**. There is a special gift of blessedness from God to the one who can say "no" to temptation, thereby saying "yes" to God.

b. **For when he has been approved:** Here James states the purpose of God in allowing temptation. The

purpose is to *approve* us; that through the testing we would be revealed as genuine and strong in our faith.

c. **Who endures temptation: Temptation** is one of the *various trials* (

Jas 1:2) we face. As we persevere through temptation, we are **approved**, and will be rewarded as the work of God in us is evident through our resistance of temptation.

d. **The crown of life which the Lord has promised:** James reminds us that it really is *worth it* to endure under the temptations we face. Our steadfastness will be rewarded as we demonstrate our **love** for Jesus (**to those who love Him**) by resisting temptation.

i. "There is a crown for me... Then will I gird up my loins and quicken my pace, since the crown is so sure to those who run with patience." (Spurgeon)

e. **To those who love Him:** This describes the *motive* for resisting temptation, because of our love for God. The passions of sinful temptation can only really be overcome by a greater passion, and that is a passion for the honor and glory and relationship with God.

i. Some resist temptation because of the fear of man. The thief suddenly becomes honest when he sees a policeman. The man or woman controls their lusts because they couldn't bear to be found out and thus embarrassed. Others resist the temptation to one sin because of the power of another sin. The greedy miser gives up partying because he doesn't want to spend the money. But the best motive for resisting temptation is to **love Him**; to **love Him** with greater power and greater passion than your love for the sin.

ii. "So that those who endure temptation rightly, endure it because they love God. They say to

themselves, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' They cannot fall into sin because it would grieve him who loves them so well, and whom they love with all their hearts." (Spurgeon)

2. (13-16) *How temptation comes and works.*

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

a. **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"**: Temptation does not come from God. Though He allows it, He Himself does not entice us to evil, though God may test our faith *without* a solicitation to evil (**nor does He Himself tempt anyone**).

i. James knew that most people have an evil tendency to blame God when they find themselves in trials. Yet by His very nature, God is *unable* to either be tempted (in the sense we are tempted, as James will explain), **nor does He Himself tempt anyone**.

ii. "He shows the great cause of sin; that lust hath a greater hand in it than either the devil or his instruments, who cannot make us sin without ourselves: they sometimes tempt, and do not prevail." (Poole)

iii. God sometimes allows great tests to come to His people, even some who might be thought of as His favorites. We think of the hard command He gave to Abraham (Gen 22:1), and the affliction He allowed to come to Job (Job 1-2). Other times He may send tests as a form of judgment upon those who have rejected

Him, such as sending a spirit to bring deception (1Ki 22:19-23) or departing from a man and refusing to answer him (1Sa 28:15-16). Yet in no case does God entice a person to evil.

iv. "Satan tempts: God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial; and it may be a trial from God's side, and a temptation from Satan's side, just as Job suffered from Satan, and it was a temptation; but he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him." (Spurgeon)

b. **Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed:** God doesn't tempt us. Instead, temptation comes when we are **drawn away** by our own fleshly **desires** and **enticed** - with the world and the devil providing the enticement.

i. **Drawn away:** "It is either a metaphor taken from a fish enticed by a bait, and drawn after it, or rather from a harlot drawing a young man out of the right way, and alluring him with the bait of pleasure to commit folly with her." (Poole)

ii. Satan certainly tempts us, but the only reason temptation has a hook in us is because of our own fallen nature, which corrupts our God-given **desires**. We often give Satan too much credit for his tempting powers and fail to recognize that we are **drawn away by** our **own desires**. Some people practically beg Satan to tempt them.

iii. Some who like to emphasize the sovereignty of God say that God is responsible for all things. Yet God is never responsible for man's sin. In his commentary on this text, John Calvin himself wrote, "When Scripture ascribes blindness or hardness of heart to God, it does not assign to him the beginning of the blindness, nor does it make him the author of sin, so

as to ascribe to him the blame.” Calvin also wrote, “Scripture asserts that the reprobate are delivered up to depraved lusts; but is it because the Lord depraves or corrupts their hearts? By no means; for their hearts are subjected to depraved lusts, because they are already corrupt and vicious.”

c. When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin:

Springing forth from corrupt **desire** is **sin**. Springing forth from **sin** is **death**. This progression to death is an inevitable result that Satan always tries to hide from us, but we should never be deceived about.

i. “James represents men’s *lust* as a *harlot*, which entices their understanding and will into its impure embraces, and from that conjunction *conceives* sin. Sin, being *brought forth*, immediately acts, and is nourished by frequent repetition, until at length it gains such strength that in its turn it *begets* death. This is the true *genealogy* of sin and death.” (Clarke)

d. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren: Satan’s great strategy in temptation is to convince us that the pursuit of our corrupt desires will somehow produce life and goodness for us. If we remember that Satan only comes *to steal, and to kill, and to destroy* (Joh 10:10), then we can more effectively resist the deceptions of temptation.

3. (17-18) *God’s goodness stands in contrast to the temptations we face.*

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

a. **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above:** We expect no true goodness from our own fallen natures and from those who would entice us. But **every good and every perfect gift** comes from God the Father in heaven.

i. Of course, the ultimate goodness of any gift must be measured on an eternal scale. Something that may seem to be only good (such as winning money in a lottery) may in fact be turned to our destruction.

b. **With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning:** God's goodness is constant. There is **no variation** with Him. Instead of shadows, God is **the Father of lights**.

i. According to Hiebert, the ancient Greek is actually "the Father of *the* lights." The specific **lights** are the celestial bodies that light up the sky, both day and night. The sun and stars never stop giving light, even when we can't see them. Even so, there is never a **shadow** with God. When night comes, the darkness isn't the fault of the sun; it shines as brightly as before. Instead, the earth has turned from the sun and darkness comes.

ii. This means that God never changes. Among modern theologians, there are some that are taken with something called *process theology*, which says that God is "maturing" and "growing" and "in process" Himself. Yet the Bible says that **there is no variation or shadow of turning** with God.

c. **Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth:** James understood that the gift of salvation was given by God, and not earned by the work or obedience of man. It is **of His own will** that **He brought us forth** for salvation.

i. **He brought us forth:** "The word properly signifies, He did the office of a mother to us, the bringing us into the light of life." (Trapp)

ii. "Now mostly, men who are generous need to have their generosity excited. They will need to be waited upon; appeals must be laid before them; they must sometimes be pressed; an example must lead them on. But 'of his own will' God did to us all that has been done, without any incentive or prompting, moved only by himself, because he delighteth in mercy; because his name and his nature are love because evermore, like the sun, it is natural to him to distribute the beams of his eternal grace." (Spurgeon)

d. **That we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures:** We can see God's goodness in our salvation, as He initiated our salvation **of His own will** and **brought us forth** to spiritual life by His **word of truth**, that we might be to His glory as **firstfruits** of His harvest.

i. In the previous verses James told us what the lust of man brings forth: sin and death. Here he tells us what the **will** of the good God brings: salvation to us, as **a kind of firstfruits of His creatures**.

ii. James may refer to his own generation of believers when he calls them **firstfruits**, especially as being mainly written to Christians from a Jewish background. The fact that these Christians from a Jewish background are **firstfruits** (Deu 26:1-4) shows that James expected a subsequent and greater harvest of Christians from a Gentile background.

iii. Some have speculated on the idea of **firstfruits of His creatures** even more (perhaps too far), saying that James had in mind a wider redemption among

unknown creatures of God, of which we are the **firstfruits** of that wider redemption.

4. (19-20) Standing firm against unrighteous anger.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

a. **Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:** We can learn to be **slow to wrath** by first learning to be **swift to hear** and **slow to speak**. Much of our anger and wrath comes from being

self-centered and not *others-centered*. **Swift to hear** is a way to be *others-centered*. **Slow to speak** is a way to be *others-centered*.

i. "But hath not Nature taught us the same that the apostle here doth, by giving us two ears, and those open; and but one tongue, and that hedged in with teeth and lips?" (Trapp)

b. **Slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God:** In light of the nature of temptation and the goodness of God, we must take special care to be **slow to wrath**, because our wrath does not accomplish the **righteousness of God**. Our **wrath** almost always simply defends or promotes our own agenda.

5. (21) Standing firm against the lusts of the flesh.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

a. **All filthiness and overflow of wickedness:** This has in mind an impure manner of living. In light of the nature of temptation and the goodness of God, we are to **lay aside all** impurity, putting them far from us.

i. **All filthiness:** “The stinking filth of a pestilent ulcer. Sin is the devil’s vomit, the soul’s excrement, the superfluity or garbage of naughtiness [**wickedness**]... as it is here called by an allusion to the garbage of the sacrifices cast into the brook Kedron, that is, the town-ditch.” (Trapp)

ii. The older King James Version translates the phrase **overflow of wickedness** as *superfluity of naughtiness*.

b. **Receive with meekness the implanted word:** In contrast to an impure manner of living, we should **receive the implanted word** of God (doing it **with meekness**, a teachable heart). This word is **able to save** us, both in our current situation and eternally. The purity of God’s word can preserve us even in an impure age.

i. “The first thing, then, is *receive*. That word ‘receive’ is a very instructive gospel word; it is the door through which God’s grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving; not by what we give to God, but by what God gives to us, and we receive from him.” (Spurgeon)

ii. Here James alluded to the spiritual power of the word of God. When it is **implanted** in the human heart, it is **able to save your souls**. The word of God carries the power of God.

6. (22-25) *How to receive the word of God.*

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty

and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

a. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only:

We must receive God's word as **doers**, not merely **hearers**. To take comfort in the fact you have heard God's word when you haven't *done* it is to deceive yourself.

i. It was common in the ancient world for people to hear a teacher. If you followed the teacher and tried to *live* what he said, you were called a *disciple* of that teacher. We may say that Jesus is looking for disciples: doers, not mere hearers.

ii. Jesus used this same point to conclude His great Sermon on the Mount. He said that the one who heard the word without doing it was like a man who built his house on the sand, but the one who heard God's word and did it was like a man whose house was built on a rock. The one who both heard and did God's word could withstand the inevitable storms of life and the judgment of eternity (Mat 7:24-27).

iii. "A teacher or preacher may give an eloquent address on the gospel, or explain ably some O.T. prophecy about Christ, but when the sermon is done, it is not done; something remains to be done by the hearers in life, and if they content themselves with sentimental admiration or with enjoying the emotional or mental treat, they need not imagine that this is religion." (Moffatt)

iv. "I fear we have many such in all congregations; admiring hearers, affectionate hearers, attached hearers, but all the while unblest hearers, because they are not doers of the word." (Spurgeon)

v. "You know the old story; I am half ashamed to repeat it again, but it is so pat to the point. When Donald came out of kirk sooner than usual, Sandy said to him, 'What, Donald, is the sermon all done?' 'No,' said Donald, 'it is all said, but it is not begun to be done yet.'" (Spurgeon)

b. He is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was: The person who only hears God's word without doing it has the same sense and stability as a man who looks into a mirror and immediately forgets what he saw. The information he received did not do any good in his life.

i. **Observing his natural face:** The ancient Greek word translated **observing** has the idea of a *careful scrutiny*. By application, James had in mind people who give a *careful scrutiny* of God's word; they may be regarded as Bible experts but it still doesn't result in *doing*.

ii. "The glass of the Word is not like our ordinary looking-glass, which merely shows us our external features; but, according to the Greek of our text, the man sees in it 'the face of his birth'; that is, the face of his nature. He that reads and hears the Word may see not only his actions there, but his motives, his desires, his inward condition." (Spurgeon)

iii. Understanding this power of the Word of God, the preacher is responsible for working hard to not hinder this power. "Certain preachers dream that it is their business to paint pretty pictures: but it is not so. We are not to design and sketch, but simply to give the reflection of truth. We are to hold up the mirror to nature in a moral and spiritual sense, and let men see themselves therein. We have not even to make the

mirror, but only to hold it up. The thoughts of God, and not our own thoughts, are to be set before our hearers' minds; and these discover a man to himself. The Word of the Lord is a revealer of secrets: it shows a man his life, his thoughts, his heart, his inmost self." (Spurgeon)

iv. A healthy person looks in the mirror to *do* something, not just to admire the image. Even so, a healthy Christian looks into God's Word to *do* something about it, not just to store up facts that he will not put to use by being a **doer** of the word.

v. "The *doctrines of God*, faithfully preached, are such a *mirror*; he who hears cannot help discovering his own character, and being affected with his own deformity; he sorrows, and purposes amendment; but when the preaching is over, the mirror is removed... he soon forgets what manner of man he was... he reasons himself out of the necessity of repentance and amendment of life, and thus deceives his soul." (Clarke)

vi. "Get thee God's law as a glass to toot [to study carefully] in, saith Mr. Bradford; so shalt thou see thy face foul arrayed, and so shamefully saucy, mangy, pocky, and scabbed, that thou canst not but be sorry at the contemplation thereof." (Trapp)

c. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it... this one will be blessed in what he does: If we study the Word of God intently, and do it (**continue in it**), then we will be **blessed**.

i. **He who looks into the perfect law of liberty:** In the ancient Greek language, the word for **looks into** spoke of a penetrating examination, so that a person would even bend over to get a better look. Though

James stressed *doing*, he did not neglect *studying* God's Word either. We should *look into* God's Word.

ii. Adam Clarke points out that the ancient Greek word translated **continues** is *paramainas* and has this sense: "Takes time to see and examine the state of his soul, the grace of his God, the extent of his duty, and the height of the promised glory. The metaphor here is taken from those females who spend much time at their glass, in order that they may decorate themselves to the greatest advantage, and not leave one hair, or the smallest ornament, out of its place."

iii. **The perfect law of liberty**: This is a wonderful way to describe the Word of God. In the New Covenant, God reveals to us a **law**, but it is a **law of liberty**, written on our transformed hearts by the Spirit of God.

iv. "The whole doctrine of Scripture, or especially the gospel, called a *law*, Rom 3:27, both as it is a rule, and by reason of the power it hath over the heart; and a *law of liberty*, because it shows the way to the best liberty, freedom from sin, the bondage of the ceremonial law, the rigour of the moral, and from the wrath of God." (Poole)

7. (26-27) *Examples of what it means to be a doer of the Word of God.*

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

a. **If anyone among you thinks he is religious**: James just explained that real religion is not shown by

hearing the word, but by doing it. One way to do God's word is to **bridle the tongue**.

i. **Thinks he is religious**: The New Testament never uses this ancient Greek word for "**religious**" in a positive sense (Act 17:22; Act 25:19; Act 26:5; Col 2:23). James used it here of someone who is **religious**, but is not really right with God, and this is evident because he **does not bridle his tongue**.

b. **This one's religion is useless**: Your walk with God **is useless** if it does not translate into the way you live and the way you treat others. Many are deceived in their own heart regarding the reality of their walk with God.

i. "This seems to reflect upon the hypocritical Jews, whose religion consisted so much in external observances, and keeping themselves from ceremonial defilements, when yet they were sullied with so many moral ones, Mat 23:23; Joh 18:28; devoured widows' houses." (Poole)

ii. "He does not deny the place of public worship (see Jas 2:2; Jas 5:14) or of religious observances, but he explains that in God's sight a **pure, unsoiled religion** expresses itself in acts of charity and in chastity – the two features of early Christian ethics which impressed the contemporary world." (Moffatt)

c. **Pure and undefiled religion before God**: There is a great deal of pure and undefiled religion *in the sight of man* that is not **pure and undefiled religion before God**.

d. **To visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world**: A real walk with God shows itself in simple, practical ways. It helps the needy and keeps itself unstained by the world's corruption.

i. "The Biblical Ritualism, the pure external worship, the true embodiment of the inward principles of religion is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Charity and purity are the two great garments of Christianity." (Spurgeon)

ii. "True religion does not merely *give* something for the *relief* of the distressed, but it *visits them*, it takes the *oversight of them*, it takes them under its care; so *episkeptesthai* means. It goes to their houses, and speaks to their hearts; it relieves their wants, sympathizes with them in their distresses, instructs them in divine things, and recommends them to God. And all this it does for the Lord's sake. This is the religion of Christ." (Clarke)

e. **Unspotted from the world:** The idea is not that a Christian retreats away from the world; instead they interact with **orphans and widows in their trouble** and others such in their need. The Christian ideal is not to retreat from the world; they are in the world, they are not *of* it; and remain **unspotted from the world**.

i. "I would like to see a Christian, not kept in a glass case away from trial and temptation, but yet covered with an invisible shield, so that, wherever he went, he would be guarded and protected from the evil influences that are in the world in almost every place." (Spurgeon)

ii. From the book of Genesis, Lot is an example of a man who *was* spotted by the world. He started living *towards* Sodom, disregarding the spiritual climate of the area because of the prosperity of the area. Eventually he moved to the wicked city and became a part of the city's leadership. The end result was that

Lot lost *everything* - and was saved as only by the skin of his teeth.

iii. "There is no book with so lofty an ideal of what life may become when it is yielded to the grace of Christ. A cleansed heart, and an unspotted robe; no sin allowed and permitted in the soul, and no evil habit allowed to dominate and enthrall the life." (Meyer)

The Sin of Partiality

Jas 2:1 My brothers, do not with respect of persons have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Jas 2:2 For if a gold-fingered man in splendid clothing comes into your synagogue, and a poor one in shabby clothing also comes in;

Jas 2:3 and you look on the one wearing the splendid clothing, and say to him, You sit here comfortably; and to the poor one you say, You stand there, or, Sit here under my footstool;

Jas 2:4 did you not also make a difference among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Jas 2:5 Hear, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to the ones loving Him?

Jas 2:6 But you dishonored the poor one. Do not the rich ones oppress you, and they drag you to judgment seats?

Jas 2:7 Do they not blaspheme the good Name called on you?

Jas 2:8 If you truly fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. Lev. 19:18

Jas 2:9 But if you have partiality to persons, you work sin, having been found guilty as transgressors by the law.

Jas 2:10 For whoever shall keep all the law, but stumbles in one, he has become guilty of all.

Jas 2:11 For He who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Ex. 20:14, 13; Deut. 5:18, 17 But if you do not commit adultery, but commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Jas 2:12 So speak and so do as being about to be judged by the law of liberty.

Jas 2:13 For judgment will be without mercy to the one not doing mercy. And mercy rejoices over judgment.

Faith Without Works Is Dead

Jas 2:14 My brothers, what is the gain if anyone says he has faith, but he does not have works? Is faith able to save him?

Jas 2:15 But if a brother or a sister is naked and may be lacking in daily food,

Jas 2:16 and any one of you say to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, but does not give them the things the body needs, what gain is it ?

Jas 2:17 So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself.

Jas 2:18 But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith out of my works.

Jas 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; even the demons believe and shudder.

Jas 2:20 But are you willing to know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is dead?

Jas 2:21 Was not our father Abraham justified by works offering up his son Isaac on the altar? Gen. 22:9

Jas 2:22 You see that faith worked with his works; and out of the works the faith was made perfected.

Jas 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled, saying, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted for righteousness

to him;" and he was called, Friend of God. Gen. 15:6; Isa. 41:8

Jas 2:24 You see, then, that a man is justified out of works, and not out of faith only.

Jas 2:25 But in the same way Rahab the harlot was also justified out of works, having received the messengers, and sending them out by another way.

Jas 2:26 For as the body is dead apart from the spirit, so also faith is dead apart from works.

James 2:1-26

James 2 - A Living Faith in the Life of the Church

A. Partiality and discrimination in the family of God.

1. (1) *The principle established.*

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

a. **Do not hold the faith:** The glorious **faith** we have, the **faith of our Lord Jesus Christ**, should never be associated **with partiality** (discrimination). The **Lord of glory** Himself shows no partiality (Deu 10:17 and Act 10:34) so neither should those who put their trust in Him.

i. James used strong words to refer to Jesus Christ: **The Lord of glory**. Moffatt comments: "The Christian religion [is here called] more explicitly **belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the divine Glory** – a striking term for Christ as the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty. The Jews called this the *shekinah*."

ii. This is especially significant because James is widely (and properly) regarded as one of the first letters of the New Testament written (perhaps somewhere

between AD 44 and 48). This means that the *earliest* Christians considered Jesus to be God, and said so in strong, unmistakable words.

b. **With partiality:** We do well to remember that James wrote to a very partial age, filled with prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever.

i. A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him (Eph 2:14-15).

ii. The unity and openness of the early church was shocking to the ancient world. But this unity didn't come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to teach the early church to never **hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ... with partiality.**

2. (2-4) *An example of the kind of partiality that has no place among Christians.*

For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

a. **If there should come into your assembly:** In the ancient Greek, the word **assembly** is literally *synagogue*, the name of the meeting place for Jews. The

fact that James calls a *Christian* meeting place a *synagogue* shows that he wrote before Gentiles were widely received into the church. At the time James wrote, most all Christians came from a Jewish heritage. This is the only place in the New Testament where an **assembly** of Christians is clearly called a *synagogue*.

i. "Till the final rift between Judaism and Christianity both Christian and non-Christian Jews used, at least often, the same word for their sacred meeting-place." (Adamson)

ii. "As Christians have no church-buildings at this period, their place of **meeting** was usually some large room in the house of a wealthy member or a hall hired for the purpose (Act 19:9), where outsiders were free to attend the ordinary services... They were to be welcomed, but welcomed without any servility or snobbery." (Moffatt)

b. **A man with gold rings:** This showed the man was rich. "In Roman society the wealthy wore rings on their left hand in great profusion. A sign of wealth, rings were worn with great ostentation. There were even shops in Rome where rings could be rented for special occasions." (Hiebert)

i. **There should also come in a poor man:** "The word signifies one very poor, even to beggarliness." (Poole)

c. **Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?** To favor the **rich man** over the **poor man** in the way James described shows a deep carnality among Christians. Their **evil thoughts** are evident by their partial actions.

i. To show **partiality** shows that we care more for the outward appearance than we do upon the heart. *For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1Sa 16:7)*. God looks at the heart, and so should we.

ii. To show **partiality** shows that we misunderstand who is important and blessed in the sight of God. When we assume that the rich man is more important to God or more blessed by God, we put too much value in material riches.

iii. To show **partiality** shows a selfish streak in us. Usually we favor the **rich man** over the **poor man** because we believe we can get more from the **rich man**. He can do favors for us that the **poor man** can't.

3. (5-7) Man's partiality rarely agrees with God's heart.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

a. **Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom:** Though it is easy for man to be partial to the rich, God isn't partial to them. In fact, since riches are an obstacle to the kingdom of God (Mat 19:24), there is a sense in which God specially blesses the poor of this world.

i. They are **chosen... to be rich in faith** because the **poor of this world** simply have more opportunities to trust God. Therefore they may be far more **rich in**

faith than the rich man. "The rich man may trust Him; but the poor man must... the poor man has no fortress in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God." (Meyer)

ii. "This seems to refer to Mat 11:5 : *And the poor have the Gospel preached to them*. These believed on the Lord Jesus, and found his salvation; while the *rich* despised, neglected, and persecuted him." (Clarke)

b. **Has not God chosen**: The poor are **chosen** in the sense that the poor more readily respond to God in faith, having fewer obstacles to the kingdom.

i. "Church history demonstrates that comparatively more poor people than rich have responded to the gospel." (Hiebert)

ii. When we choose people by what we can see on the surface, we miss the mind of God. Remember that Judas *appeared* to be much better leadership material than Peter.

iii. What is more, we can say that God has **chosen the poor** in the sense that when He added humanity to His deity and came to earth, He came into poverty. "There is nothing that men dread more than poverty. They will break every commandment in the Decalogue rather than be poor. But it is God's chosen lot. He had one opportunity only of living our life, and He chose to be born of parents too poor to present more than two doves at his presentation in the temple." (Meyer)

iv. Of course, God has not *only* **chosen the poor**. Yet we may say that He has **chosen the poor** first, in the sense Paul spoke of in 1Co 1:26 : *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are*

called. "Not that God hath chosen all the poor in the world, but his choice is chiefly of them." (Poole)

v. Calvin wrote regarding God's choice of the poor: "Not indeed alone, but he wished to begin with them, that he might beat down the pride of the rich."

vi. We should remind ourselves that God also never calls for partiality *against* the rich. If one must judge in a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, they should let the law and the facts of the case decide the judgment instead of the economic class of those in the dispute.

c. **Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?** James reminded his readers that the rich often sin against them (**oppress you... drag you**). This is often because the love of money is the root of every kind of evil (1Ti 6:10). For this reason alone, the rich are not worthy of the partiality often shown to them.

i. History shows that the rich can indeed oppress the poor. "Trample upon you with the feet of pride and cruelty; yea, devour you, as the greater fish do the lesser... This is a sin against race, grace, and place." (Trapp)

ii. **Do they not blaspheme:** "If the rich here spoken of were Christians, then they may be said to blaspheme Christ's name, when by their wicked carriage they caused it to be blasphemed by others... but if rich unbelievers be here meant, the rich men of those times being generally great enemies to Christianity." (Poole)

4. (8-9) *Partiality is condemned by the Scriptures.*

If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"

you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

a. **If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture:** James anticipated that some of his readers might defend their partiality to the rich as simply loving the rich man as their neighbor in obedience to the law.

b. **If you show partiality, you commit sin:** The problem isn't that one is nice to the rich. The problem is that one does **show partiality** to the rich, and is not nice to the poor man! So you can't excuse your **partiality** by saying, "I'm just fulfilling the command to love my neighbor as myself."

c. **The royal law:** Our God is a great King, and His law is a **royal law**. Our King Jesus put special emphasis on this command (Mat 22:36-40) from the Old Testament (Lev 19:18). James is reminding us that the poor man is just as much our **neighbor** as the rich man is.

i. "This commandment, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, is a *royal law*, not only because it is ordained of God, and proceeds from his *kingly* authority over men, but because it is so *useful, suitable, and necessary* to the present state of man... we give the epithet *royal* to whatever is excellent, noble, grand, or useful." (Clarke)

5. (10-13) *The serious matter of obeying all of God's commands.*

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy

to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

a. **Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all:** James here guards us against a selective obedience, the sort that will pick and choose which commands of God should be obeyed and which can be safely disregarded.

i. We can't say, "I like God's command against murder, so I'll keep that one. But I don't like His command against adultery, so I will disregard it." God cares about the **whole law**.

ii. The **whole law** must be kept if one will be justified by the law. "In the tract *Shabbath*, fol. 70, where they dispute concerning the thirty-nine works commanded by Moses, Rabbi Yochanan says: *But if a man do the whole, with the omission of one, he is guilty of the whole, with the one.*" (Clarke) Adamson quotes one ancient Rabbi who taught: "If a man perform all the commandments, save one, he is guilty of all and each; to break one precept is to defy God who commanded the whole."

iii. "He breaks the whole law, though not the whole of the law: as he that wounds a man's arm wounds the whole man, though not the whole of the man." (Poole)

b. **So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty:** We are under the **law of liberty**. It has **liberty**, yet it is still a **law** that must be obeyed and that we will be judged by at the judgment seat of Christ (2Co 5:10).

i. "It is also called a law of liberty, because it is freely and willingly kept of the regenerate, to whom it is no burden or bondage." (Trapp)

c. **For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy:** As those who **will be judged by the law of liberty**, we should always show **mercy** to others by refraining from partiality. The mercy we show will be extended to us again on the day of judgment, and that **mercy triumphs over judgment**.

i. James is relating another principle of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you* (Mat 7:2).

ii. "The law of liberty is the law which defines our relationship to God and man as love-mastered. To speak and do under that impulse, is to be free indeed. If that law be disobeyed, if no mercy be shown, then judgment based upon that law will show no mercy." (Morgan)

iii. "The **law of freedom** is not laxity but a strict ethical rule of God, and we shall be **judged** by our adherence to its supreme principle of brotherly love or **mercy**, i.e. compassion for the sins and sufferings of our fellows." (Moffatt)

iv. **Mercy triumphs over judgment:** Moffatt translates this, "The merciful life will triumph in the face of judgment." "That is, the merciful man glorieth, as one that hath received mercy, and shall not come into condemnation; for God's mercy rejoiceth against such a man's sins, as against an adversary which he hath subdued and trampled on." (Trapp)

B. The demonstration of a living faith in loving action.

1. (14) *The principle established: true faith will be accompanied by action.*

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save

him?

a. **What does it profit, my brethren:** James thought it impossible that someone could genuinely have saving faith with no works. But someone could say **he has faith**, but fail to show good works. So, the question is valid: **Can that kind of faith save him?**

i. "The apostle had just before declared, that they who are unmerciful to men shall find God severe to themselves, and have judgment without mercy: but hypocritical professors boasted of their faith as sufficient to secure them against that judgment, though they neglected the practice of holiness and righteousness." (Poole)

b. **Someone says he has faith but does not have works:** James wrote to Christians from a Jewish background that discovered the glory of salvation by faith. They knew the exhilaration of freedom from works-righteousness. But they then went to the other extreme of thinking that **works** didn't matter at all.

c. **Can faith save him?** James did not contradict the Apostle Paul, who insisted that we are saved *not of works* (Eph 2:9). James merely clarifies for us the *kind of faith that saves*. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works; but saving faith will have works that accompany it. As a saying goes: *faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone*; it has good works with it.

i. Paul also understood the necessity of works in proving the character of our faith. He wrote: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Eph 2:10). He also wrote: *This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in*

God should be careful to maintain good works.
(Tit 3:8)

ii. **Can faith save him?** "That is, his profession of faith; for it is not said that he *has faith*, but that *he says*, I have faith." (Clarke)

2. (15-17) *An example of dead faith.*

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

a. **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food:** To fail in the most simple good work towards a brother or sister in need demonstrates that one does not have a living faith, and we can only be saved by a living faith in Jesus.

i. "Under these two of nakedness and hunger, he comprehends all the calamities of human life, which may be relieved by the help of others; as food and raiment contain all the ordinary supports and comforts of life, Gen 28:20; Mat 6:25; 1Ti 6:8." (Poole)

b. **Be warmed and filled:** To say this means you know that the person in front of you *needs* clothing and food. You know their need well, but offer nothing to help them except a few religious words.

i. "How many have we now-a-days that will be but as friends at a sneeze! The most you can get out of these benefactors is, 'God bless you, Christ help you.'" (Trapp)

c. **What does it profit?** Real faith, and the works that accompany it, are not made up of only spiritual things,

but also of a concern for the most basic needs - such as the need for comfort, covering, and food. When needs arise, we should sometimes *pray* less, and simply *do more* to help the person in need. We can sometimes *pray* as a substitute for *action*.

i. "Your pretending to have faith, while you have no works of charity or mercy, is utterly vain: for as *faith*, which is a principle in the mind, cannot be discerned but by the *effects*, that is, *good works*; he who has no good works has, presumptively, no faith." (Clarke)

d. **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead:** This is the first time James speaks of a **dead** faith. Faith alone saves us, but it must be a *living faith*. We can tell if faith is *alive* by seeing if it is accompanied by **works**, and **if it does not have works, it is dead**.

i. A *living faith* is simply *real faith*. If we really believe something we will follow through and act upon it. If we really put our trust and faith on Jesus, we will care for the **naked and destitute** as He told us to do.

ii. "He doth not say, faith is dead without works, lest it should be thought that works were the cause of the life of faith; but *faith without works is dead*; implying, that works are the effects and signs of the life of faith." (Poole)

iii. What are some marks of saving faith?

- It is faith that looks not to self, but to Jesus Christ.
- It is faith that agrees with God's word, both inwardly and with words.
- It is faith that in itself is not a work that deserves reward from God; in this sense it is simply *refusing* to think God is a liar, and that in itself is not a good work, simply the absence of a sinful work.

- It is faith grounded in what Jesus did on the cross and by the empty tomb.
- It is faith that will *naturally* be expressed in repentance and good works.
- It is faith that may sometimes doubt; yet the doubts are not *bigger* than the faith nor are they *more permanent* than the faith. This faith can say, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief."
- It is faith that wants others to come to the same faith.
- It is faith that says *more* than "Lord, Lord" as in Mat 7:21-23.
- It is faith that not only *hears* the word of God but *does* it, as in Mat 7:24-27.

3. (18-19) *A living faith cannot be separated from works.*

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe— and tremble!

a. **You have faith, and I have works:** Some might try to say that some have the "gift" of **works** and others have the "gift" of **faith**. "It's fine for you to have your gift of **works** and that you care for the needy. But that isn't my gift." James will not allow this kind of thinking. Real faith will be demonstrated by works.

b. **Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works:** The appeal of James is clear and logical. We can't "see" someone's faith, but we *can* see their works. You can't see faith **without** works, but you can demonstrate the reality of faith **by** works.

c. **You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!** The fallacy of faith without works is demonstrated by the **demons**, which have a “dead” faith in God. The demons **believe** in the sense that they acknowledge that God exists. But this kind of faith does nothing for the **demons**, because it isn’t real faith, and that is proved by the fact that it doesn’t have works along with it.

4. (20-24) *Abraham as an example of living faith.*

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

a. **Do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?** James will now use the Old Testament to demonstrate what he has already said about the character of a living faith, showing that a **faith** that is not accompanied with **works** is a **dead** faith that cannot save.

b. **Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?** Abraham was justified by faith long before he offered Isaac (Gen 15:6). But his obedience in offering Isaac *demonstrated* that he really did trust God.

i. James properly estimates that Abraham actually *did* offer **Isaac his son on the altar**, even though the angel stopped him from actually killing his son. Yet he had **offered Isaac his son** in his firm resolution and

intentions, and would have surely completed the act had not God stopped him. Abraham was so complete in his obedience that he counted Isaac as dead and set him **on the altar**.

c. **Faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect:** Faith and works cooperated perfectly together in Abraham. If he never had believed God, he could have never done the good work of obedience when asked to offer Isaac. As well, his faith was proven true – was completed, **was made perfect** – by his obedient works.

i. "Here is a proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His faith in God would have been of no avail to him, had it not been manifested by works." (Clarke)

d. **You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only:** The **faith only** that will not justify a man is a faith that is without works, a dead faith. But true faith, living faith, shown to be true by good works, will alone justify.

i. "It is faith that justifieth the man; but they are works that justify faith to be right and real, saving and justifying." (Trapp)

ii. Works *must* accompany a genuine faith, because genuine faith is always connected with regeneration - being born again, becoming a *new creation* in Jesus (2Co 5:17). If there is no evidence of a new life, then there was no genuine, saving faith.

iii. As Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said: "The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul."

5. (25-26) *Rahab as an example of living faith.*

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

a. **Rahab the harlot:** Significantly, James used two examples of a living faith – Abraham (the father of the Jews) and Rahab (a Gentile). James perhaps is subtly rebuking the partiality that may have developed on the part of Jewish Christians against the Gentile believers starting to come into the church.

b. **Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works:** Rahab demonstrated her trust in the God of Israel by hiding the spies and seeking salvation from their God (Jos 2:8-13). Her faith was shown to be living faith because it *did* something. Her belief in the God of Israel would not have saved her if she had not *done* something with that faith.

i. The lesson from Abraham is clear: if we believe in God, we will do what He tells us to do. The lesson from Rahab is also clear: if we believe in God, we will help His people, even when it costs us something.

ii. "He designedly put together two persons so different in their character, in order more clearly to shew, that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works." (Calvin, cited in Hiebert)

c. **For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also:** As much as you can have a body with no life (a corpse), so you can have a faith with no life - and faith without works is a **dead** faith, unable to save.

i. "Therefore, if no deeds are forthcoming, it is proof that the professed faith is dead. Notice that James does not deny that it is faith. He simply indicates that it is not the right kind of faith. It is not living faith, nor can it save." (Burdick)

ii. We can think of an apple tree; where is the life of the tree? It is in the root, and underneath the bark of the tree in the trunk. The life is not in the apples, the fruit that is displayed in season; but if the tree is alive *it will produce apples in season.*

iii. "Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits." (Calvin)

Taming the Tongue

Jas 3:1 My brothers do not be many teachers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment.

Jas 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways . If any one does not stumble in word, this one is a mature man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Jas 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the mouths of the horses, for them to obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

Jas 3:4 Behold, the ships also, being so great, and being driven by violent winds, they are directed by a very small rudder, where the impulse of the one steering purposes.

Jas 3:5 So also the tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how little a fire kindles how large a forest!

Jas 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the world of iniquity. So the tongue is set among our members, spotting all the body, and inflaming the course of nature, and having been inflamed by Hell.

Jas 3:7 For every species of beasts, both indeed of birds, of creeping things, and of sea animals, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human species ;

Jas 3:8 but no one of men is able to tame the tongue; it is an evil that cannot be restrained, full of death-dealing poison.

Jas 3:9 By this we bless God and the Father; and by this we curse men having come into being according to the image of God. Gen. 1:26

Jas 3:10 Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brothers it is not fitting for these things to be so.

Jas 3:11 Does the fountain out of the same hole send forth the sweet and the bitter?

Jas 3:12 My brothers, a fig tree is not able to produce olives, or a vine figs. So neither can a fountain produce both salt and sweet water.

Wisdom from Above

Jas 3:13 Who is wise and knowing among you? Let him show his works by his good behavior, in meekness of wisdom.

Jas 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and contention in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth.

Jas 3:15 This is not the wisdom coming down from above, but is earthly, beastly, devilish.

Jas 3:16 For where jealousy and contention are , there is confusion and every foul deed.

Jas 3:17 But the wisdom from above is firstly truly pure, then peaceable, forbearing, yielding, full of mercy and of good fruits, not partial and not pretended.

Jas 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for the ones making peace.

James 3:1-18

James 3 - Warnings and Words to Teachers

A. The demonstration of a living faith in controlling what we say.

1. (1-2) Opening observations: the greater accountability of teachers and the difficulty of not stumbling.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

a. **Let not many of you become teachers:** James has a sober admonition for those who would **become teachers** in the church. They must take the responsibility seriously, because their accountability is greater and they shall **receive a stricter judgment**.

i. It is easy to take the position of teacher lightly in the church, without considering its cost in terms of accountability. Jesus warned *to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much have been committed, of him they will ask the more.* (Luk 12:48)

ii. The words of Jesus and James remind us that being among the **teachers** in God's church is more than a matter of having natural or even spiritual gifts; there is an additional dimension of appropriate character and right living. "James found that this department of church-work had become extremely popular. Hence his warning about its serious responsibilities. God will judge us on the last day **with special strictness** on account of our influence over others." (Moffatt)

iii. Therefore, **teachers** were both tested more and would be judged more strictly. "Their case is awful; *they shall receive greater condemnation* than common sinners; they have not only sinned in thrusting themselves into that office to which God has never called them, but through their *insufficiency* the flocks over whom they have assumed the *mastery* perish for lack of knowledge, and their blood will God require at the watchman's hand." (Clarke)

iv. "The comparative adjective *greater* [**stricter**] implies degrees of treatment at the judgment seat." (Hiebert)

b. **For we all stumble in many things:** The greater accountability of teachers is especially sobering in light of our common weaknesses. After all, **we all stumble in many things**. The ancient Greek word translated **stumble** does not imply a fatal fall, but something that trips us up and hinders our spiritual progress.

i. **We all stumble:** James included himself among those who **stumble**. Yet he did not excuse his or our stumbling. We know that **we all stumble**, but we should all press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by *less* stumbling.

ii. This is another of the several statements in the Bible which tell us that all men sin (also including 1Ki 8:46; Job 14:4; Pro 20:9; Ecc 7:20; and 1Jn 1:8; 1Jn 1:10).

c. **If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man:** James provided a way to measure spiritual maturity for teachers and for all Christians. Jesus demonstrated in Mat 12:34-37 that words are the revelation of the inner character.

i. To **not stumble in word** shows true spiritual maturity. This is especially relevant to teachers, who have so much more opportunity to sin with their tongue.

- We **stumble in word** about ourselves, with our boasting, exaggeration, and selective reporting.
- We **stumble in word** about others, with our criticism, gossip, slander, cruelty, two-facedness, and anger; or with flattery and insincere words meant to gain favor.

2. (3-6) *The power of the tongue.*

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

a. **We put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us:** A small bit in the mouth controls a strong horse. A small rudder turns a large ship. Even so, if we have control over our tongue it is an indication that we have control over our self. Whoever can control the tongue can *bridle the whole body* (Jas 3:2).

i. The bit and the rudder are small but extremely important. If they are not controlled the entire horse is out of control and the entire ship is out of control. It is possible for something as small as the tongue is to have tremendous power for either good or evil.

ii. You don't solve the problem of an unruly horse by keeping it in the barn, or the problem of a hard-to-steer ship by keeping it tied to the dock. In the same way, even a vow of silence is not the ultimate answer for the misuse of our tongue.

iii. If the tongue is like a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder on a ship, it leaves us with the question: *Who or what holds the reins, or who or what directs the rudder?* Some people have *no* hand on the reins or rudder, and therefore say whatever comes into mind. Others direct their tongue from their emotions or from aspects of their carnal nature. James points us towards having the Spirit of God, working through the new man, set directing hands on the reins and rudder that is our tongue.

b. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: The fire of the tongue has been used to burn many. Children are told *sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me*. But that child's rhyme isn't really true; the bitter pain of a word spoken against us can hurt us for a lifetime, long after a broken bone has healed.

i. "In the two former illustrations, animals and ships are controlled by small objects; in this last illustration, a huge forest is destroyed by a tiny spark. The tongue likewise can either control or destroy." (Burdick)

ii. What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life.

iii. Proverbs speaks of the person who doesn't consider the destructive power of his words. *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "I was only joking!"* (Pro 26:18-19).

iv. Again, James isn't telling us to never speak or to take a vow of silence; in many ways that would be *easier* than exercising true self-control over the tongue. The bridle, the rudder, and the fire can all do tremendous *good* when they are controlled properly.

c. **The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity:** There aren't many sins that don't involve talking in some way. "It is though all the wickedness in the whole world were wrapped up in that little piece of flesh." (Burdick)

i. "It walketh through the earth, and faceth the very heavens, Psa 73:9. It can run the world over and bite at everybody; being as a sharp razor... that instead of shaving the hair cutteth the throat, Psa 52:2. It is made in the shape of sword; and David felt it as a sword in his bones, Psa 42:10. It is thin, broad, and long, as an instrument most fit to empty both speaker's and the hearer's heart. It is of a flame-colour, as apt to set on fire the whole wheel of nature, Jas 3:6." (Trapp)

ii. James echoes the testimony of Proverbs regarding the tongue:

- *In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.* (Pro 10:19-21)

- *Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.* (Pro 12:25)

- *Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. (Pro 16:24)*
- *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Pro 18:21)*

3. (7-8) *The difficulty of taming the tongue.*

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

a. **Every kind of beast and bird... has been tamed by mankind:** A wild animal can be more easily tamed than the tongue. In fact, James tells us that **no man can tame the tongue**.

i. The human spirit has incredible capacity for sacrifice and self-control. Sometimes we hear a desperate survival story of someone who cuts off their own leg to get free from a tree that has fallen on them, and then they make it to a hospital for medical treatment. Yet that same man can't **tame the tongue** perfectly.

b. **No man can tame the tongue:** Nevertheless the **tongue** can be brought under the power and the control of the Holy Spirit. We might say that only God Himself is mightier than the human tongue!

c. **It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison:** The untamable tongue is even more dangerous when we consider the **deadly poison** it can deliver.

i. "The poison of the tongue is no less deadly, it murders men's reputations by the slanders it utters, their souls by the lusts and passions it stirs up in them, and many times their bodies too by the contentions and quarrels it raiseth against men." (Poole)

ii. A woman once came to John Wesley and said she knew what her talent was and she said, "I think my talent from God is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "I don't think God would mind if you buried that talent." Speaking forth everything that comes to mind is unwise, poisonous speech.

4. (9-12) *The contradictory character of the tongue.*

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

a. **With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men:** The tongue can be used for the highest calling (to **bless our God**) and it can be used for the lowest evil (to **curse men**). In those who are born again, it shouldn't be said that **out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing**.

i. Peter's tongue confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God *and* denied Jesus with curses. John said, "Little children, love one another" *and* he wanted to say the word to bring down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village.

b. **These things ought not to be so:** Our speech should be consistently glorifying to God. We shouldn't use one vocabulary or one tone of speaking at church and a different one at home or on the job. Like a spring of water, our mouths shouldn't **send forth fresh... and bitter from the same opening**.

i. "This outburst of James suggests that he had suffered from the strife of tongues in the religious world... it reads like a transcript of bitter experience." (Moffatt)

c. Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh:

James points to the ultimate *impossibility* of such a contradiction. If bad fruit and bitter water continue to come forth, it means that there is no contradiction. The tree is bad and the spring is bad.

i. Jesus taught in Mat 12:34-37 that a man's words are a reliable revelation of his inner character. What we say can indicate what we are.

ii. **Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives:** "It would be a monstrosity, a thing to be wondered at, and stared at as unnatural and absurd if a fig tree started bearing olive berries and *it is just as unnatural for a Christian to live in sin*. Can he so live as to bear the fruits of iniquity instead of the fruits of righteousness? God forbid that it should be so!" (Spurgeon)

iii. "Unless you are regenerated, born from above by a new and heavenly birth, you are not Christians, whatever you may be called, and you cannot, produce the fruit which is acceptable to God any more than a fig tree can produce olive berries." (Spurgeon)

- You can label a fig tree "Olive Tree" and that will not make it an olive tree.
- You can trim a fig tree to look like an olive tree, and that will not make it an olive tree.
- You can treat a fig tree like an olive tree, and that will not make it an olive tree.
- You can surround a fig tree with many olive trees, and that will not make it an olive tree.

- You can transplant that fig tree to the Mount of Olives, and that would not make it an olive tree.

B. The demonstration of a living faith in the presence of wisdom.

1. (13) Wisdom shows us how to do good works

Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.

a. **Who is wise and understanding among you?** At the beginning of James 3, the author addressed those who were teachers or wanted to be teachers among Christians. There he told such teachers how they should *talk*; here he speaks about how they should *live*.

i. "James addresses the person who is 'wise and understanding.' The word *sophos* ('wise') was the technical term among the Jews for the teacher, the scribe, the rabbi. It appears that the author is still speaking to those who would be teachers (cf. Jas 3:1); here it is not what they say that he is concerned with, but rather how they live." (Burdick)

b. **Who is wise... Let him show by good conduct:** Wisdom is not mere head knowledge. Real wisdom and **understanding** will show in our lives, by our **good conduct**.

i. In this sense wisdom and understanding are like faith; they are invisible, inner qualities. If a person considers himself to be **wise** or **understanding**, it is fair to expect that this invisible inner quality would show itself in regular life. Here James told us how to judge if a person really is **wise and understanding**.

c. **His works are done in the meekness of wisdom:** True **wisdom** is also evident by its meek manner. Those

who do their good works in a way designed to bring attention to themselves show they lack true wisdom.

- i. On **meekness**: "*Prautes* is gentleness, but not a passive gentleness growing out of weakness or resignation. It is an active attitude of deliberate acceptance." (Burdick)

2. (14-16) *The character of earthly wisdom.*

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

- a. **Bitter envy and self-seeking**: These are the opposite of *the meekness of wisdom* mentioned in Jas 3:13. These words actually refer to someone who has a critical, contentious, fight-provoking manner.

- i. "It is out of keeping with the temper of **bitter jealousy and rivalry** (i.e. party-spirit, selfish ambition, factiousness). **Do not pride yourselves on that**, on the intensity and harsh zeal which lead to such unscrupulous partisanship, which are sometimes justified as loyalty **to the truth**." (Moffatt)

- ii. "Religious people may be extremely provoking, and defeat their own ends by overbearing methods; right views and sound counsels may lose their effect if they are expressed by men who are self-seeking partisans or unscrupulous controversialists." (Moffatt)

- b. **Do not boast and lie against the truth**: Anyone who shows **bitter envy and self-seeking** should not deceive anyone - especially themselves - about how wise they are. They show a **wisdom** that is **earthly, sensual, and demonic**. Their wisdom is more

characteristic of the world, the flesh, and the devil than of God.

i. **"This wisdom"** that James referred to was not really wisdom at all. "It is the wisdom claimed by the would-be teachers of Jas 3:14 whose lives contradict their claims. Such 'wisdom' evaluates everything by worldly standards and makes personal gain life's highest goal." (Burdick)

ii. **Earthly, sensual, demonic:** Adam Clarke defined each term:

- **Earthly:** "Having this life only in view."
- **Sensual:** "Animal-having for its object the gratification of the passions and animal propensities."
- **Demonic:** "Demoniacal-inspired by demons, and maintained in the soul by their indwelling influence."

c. **Confusion and every evil thing:** This is the fruit of human, earthly wisdom. The wisdom of the world, the flesh, and the devil may be able to accomplish things, but always with the ultimate fruit of **confusion and every evil thing**.

3. (17-18) *The character of heavenly wisdom.*

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

a. **But the wisdom that is from above:** God's wisdom also has fruit. James here defined exactly what he meant by *the meekness of wisdom* in Jas 3:13.

b. **First pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy:** The character of

this wisdom is wonderful. It is full of love and a giving heart, consistent with the holiness of God.

i. This wisdom is **first pure**: "The reference is not to sexual purity but to the absence of any sinful attitude or motive." (Burdick)

ii. This wisdom is **then peaceable**: "This is one of the great words of character description in the NT. In the LXX it is used mostly of God's disposition as a King. He is gentle and kind, although in reality he has every reason to be stern and punitive toward men in their sin." (Burdick)

iii. This wisdom is **gentle**: "The man who is *epieikes* is the man who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. He knows how to forgive when strict justice gives him a perfect right to condemn... It is impossible to find an English word to translate this quality. Matthew Arnold called it 'sweet reasonableness' and it is the ability to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves." (Barclay)

iv. This wisdom is **willing to yield**: "Not stubborn nor obstinate; of a yielding disposition in all indifferent things; obsequious, docile." (Clarke) "**Conciliatory** (only here in N.T.) is the opposite of stiff and unbending." (Moffatt) "*Eupeithes* can mean *easy to persuade*, not in the sense of being pliable and weak, but in the sense of not being stubborn and of being willing to listen to reason and to appeal... true wisdom is not rigid but is willing to listen and skilled in knowing when wisely to yield." (Barclay)

v. This wisdom is **full of mercy**: It does not judge others strictly on the basis of the law, but will extend a generous hand **full of mercy**. This wisdom knows

that the same measure of mercy we grant to others is the same measure God will use with us (Mat 7:2).

vi. This wisdom is **full of... good fruits**: This wisdom can *be seen by the fruit it produces*. It isn't just the inner power to think and talk about things the right way; it is **full of... good fruits**.

vii. This wisdom is **without partiality**: "*Without partiality*; or, without judging, i.e. either a curious inquiring into the faults of others, to find matter for censures." (Poole)

viii. This wisdom is **without hypocrisy**: "*Without pretending to be what it is not*; acting always in *its own character*; never working under a mask. Seeking nothing but God's glory, and using no other means to attain it than those of his own prescribing." (Clarke)

ix. "These last two words [**without partiality** and **without hypocrisy**] rule out the habit of using speech to half reveal and half conceal the mind of the speaker, who has something (as we say) at the back of his mind all the time." (Moffatt)

c. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace:
This fruit is like a seed that will bear fruit as it is sown by **those who make peace**.

i. "*The fruit of righteousness*; either the fruit we bring forth, which is righteousness itself, Luk 3:8-9; Rom 6:22; Php 1:11; or the fruit we reap, which is the reward of righteousness, viz. eternal life." (Poole)

ii. "Far from being theoretical and speculative, James's concept of wisdom is thoroughly practical. It is the understanding and attitude that result in true piety and godliness." (Burdick)

Warning Against Worldliness

Jas 4:1 From where do wars and fightings among you come ? Is it not from this, from your lusts warring in your members?

Jas 4:2 You desire greatly and do not have. You murder, and are jealous, and are not able to obtain. You fight and you war, and you do not have, because you do not ask God .

Jas 4:3 You ask, and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order that you may spend on your lusts.

Jas 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever, then, purposes to be a friend of the world is shown to be an enemy of God.

Jas 4:5 Or do you think that vainly the Scripture says, The spirit which has dwelt in us yearns to envy? No OT passage

Jas 4:6 But He gives greater grace. Because of this it says, "God sets Himself against proud ones, but He gives grace to humble ones." Prov. 3:34

Jas 4:7 Then be subject to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

Jas 4:8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners! And purify your hearts, double minded ones!

Jas 4:9 Be distressed, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into shame.

Jas 4:10 Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Jas 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brothers. He that speaks against a brother, and is judging a brother, he speaks against law, and judges law. But if you judge law, you are not a doer of law, but a judge.

Jas 4:12 One is the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you who judges another?

Boasting About Tomorrow

Jas 4:13 Come now, those saying, Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, and we will spend one year there, and we will trade and will make a profit,

Jas 4:14 who do not know of the morrow. For what is your life? For it is a mist, which for a little while appears, and then disappears.

Jas 4:15 Instead of you saying, If the Lord wills, even we will live, and we will do this or that;

Jas 4:16 but now you boast in your presumptions. All such boasting is evil.

Jas 4:17 Therefore, to anyone knowing to do good, and not doing it , it is sin to him.

James 4:1-17

James 4 - The Humble Dependence of a True Faith

A. The humble character of a living faith.

1. (1-3) Reasons for strife in the Christian community.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

a. **Where do wars and fights come from among you?** James accurately described strife among Christians with the terms **wars and fights**. Often the battles that happen among Christians are bitter and severe.

i. "He does not mean that they war within a man – although that is also true – but that they set men warring against each other." (Barclay)

b. **Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?** The source of **wars and fights** among Christians is always the same. There is some root of carnality, an internal **war** within the believer regarding the lusts of the flesh. No two believers who are both walking in the Spirit of God towards each other can live with **wars and fights** among themselves.

i. "James seems to be bothered more by the selfish spirit and bitterness of the quarrels than by the rights and wrongs of the various viewpoints." (Moo)

ii. Almost all who have such a critical and contentious attitude claim they are prompted and supported by the Spirit of God. James makes it clear that this contentious manner comes **from your desires**. "It is self-evident that the Spirit of God does not create desire which issues in envying." (Morgan)

c. **Your desires for pleasure that war in your members:** The types of **desires** that lead to conflict are described. *Covetousness* leads to conflict (**you lust and do not have**). *Anger* and *animosity* lead to hatred and conflict (**murder**).

i. Again James looked back to the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus also used **murder** to express more than actual killing, but also as an inward condition of heart, shown outwardly by anger (Mat 5:21-22).

ii. "The word *kill* [**murder**] is startling and meant to startle; James sought to force his readers to realize the depth of the evil in their bitter hatred toward others." (Hiebert)

d. **Yet you do not have:** This points to the *futility* of this life lived for the **desires for pleasure**. Not only is it a life of conflict, but it is also a fundamentally *unsatisfied* life.

i. "The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to obtain their object." (Spurgeon)

ii. This is the tragic irony of the life lived after worldly and fleshly desires; it never reaches the goal it gives everything for. This fundamental dissatisfaction is not because of a lack of effort: "If the lusters fail, it is not because they did not set to work to gain their ends; for according to their nature they used the most practical means within their reach, and used them eagerly, too." (Spurgeon)

iii. This helps us to rationally understand the folly of living life after the lusts of the world and our animal appetites. You are tempted to fulfill a sinful desire because you think (or hope) that it may be *satisfied*, but it will *never* be satisfied. Why not accept your lack of such satisfaction now, instead of after much painful and harmful sin?

e. **Yet you do not have because you do not ask:** The reason these destructive desires exist among Christians is because they do not seek God for their needs (**you do not ask**). James reminds us here of the great power of prayer, and why one may live unnecessarily as a spiritual pauper, simply because they do not pray, or do not **ask** when they pray.

i. We might state it as a virtual spiritual law: that God does not give unless we ask. If we possess little of God and His Kingdom, almost certainly we have asked little. "Remember this text: Jehovah says to his own Son, 'Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that he may have, you and I cannot expect the rule

to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?" (Spurgeon)

ii. "If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it... Do you know, brothers, what great things are to be had for the asking? Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven lies before the grasp of the asking man; all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer." (Spurgeon)

f. **You ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures:** After dealing with the problem of *no prayer*, now James addressed the problem of *selfish prayer*. These ones, when they did ask, they asked God with purely selfish motives.

i. We must remember that the purpose of prayer is not to persuade a reluctant God to do our bidding. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with His, and in partnership with Him, to ask Him to accomplish His will on this earth (Mat 6:10).

ii. "When a man so prays he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires; nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous, but a large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds." (Spurgeon)

iii. **Spend** is the same verb used to describe the wasteful spending of the Prodigal Son in Luk 15:14. Destructive desires persist, even if we pray, because our prayers may be self-centered and self-indulgent.

2. (4-5) *A rebuke of compromise and covetousness among Christians.*

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

a. **Adulterers and adulteresses:** This is a rebuke presented in Old Testament vocabulary. God spoke this way in the Old Testament when His people were attracted to some form of idolatry (Jer 3:8-9, Eze 6:9, Eze 16:32, Eze 23:37, and Hos 3:1). As James saw it here, their covetousness was idolatry (Col 3:5) and **friendship with the world**.

i. Better ancient Greek manuscripts only say *you adulteresses*. "He uses the feminine form deliberately, for one turn of special contempt and scorn in the ancient world was to call a community or group by some feminine equivalent." (Moffatt)

ii. The addition of **adulterers** was probably from an early scribe who thought James meant literal sexual adultery and didn't want to exclude men from the rebuke. But James used the phrase *you adulteresses* to give a specific spiritual picture. According to this picture, God is the "husband" and we are His "wife" (as in Old Testament passages such as Isa 54:5, Jer 3:20, and Exo 34:15-16).

iii. "The Jews, because of their *covenant* with God, are represented as being *espoused* to him; and hence, their idolatry, and their iniquity in general, are represented under the notion of *adultery*." (Clarke)

iv. "You have your hearts full of harlotry... this vile strumpet the world, that lays forth her two breasts of profit and pleasure, and ensnareth many; for the which she must be burnt, as a whore, by the fire of the last day." (Trapp)

b. **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?** James recognizes that we cannot both be friends of this world system in rebellion against God, and friends of God at the same time (Mat 6:24). Even the *desire* to be a friend (**wants to be a friend**) of the world makes that one an **enemy of God**.

i. "Such **friendship with the world** means that one is on a footing of hostility towards God, for it defies His will and despises His purpose; disguise it as one may, it is an implicit challenge to God." (Moffatt)

ii. The strong statements James made here remind us that all was not beautiful in the early church. They had plenty of carnality and worldliness to deal with. While the New Testament church is a clear pattern for us, we should not over-romanticize the spiritual character of early Christians.

c. **The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously:** The indwelling presence of the Holy **Spirit** has a jealous yearning for our friendship with God. The **Spirit** will convict the Christian who lives in compromise.

i. This phrase is a little hard to accurately translate. Is it *God jealously yearning for the devotion of our spirit which He put within us*, or is it *the Spirit within us jealously yearning for the full devotion of our heart*? Either way, the sense is much the same.

ii. "He went so far as to speak of them as adulterers and adulteresses; and then adopting a gentler, pleading tone, he says, 'You are grieving the Holy

Spirit who has come to dwell within you, who yearns with a jealous envy to possess your entire nature for Himself.” (Meyer)

iii. James agrees with the many passages in the Old Testament that tell us God is a jealous God (Deu 32:16; Deu 32:21; Exo 20:5; Exo 34:14; Zec 8:2). “The idea is that God loves men with such a passion that he cannot bear any other love within the hearts of men.” (Barclay)

iv. Think of the inner pain and torture inside the person who is betrayed by an unfaithful spouse; who must reckon with the truth, *I am faithful to them, but they are not faithful to me*. This is what the Spirit of God feels regarding our world-loving hearts.

d. **The Scripture says:** One cannot find this exact quote (“**The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously**”) in any specific Old Testament verse. James seemed to present an idea that is alluded to in several passages without quoting any specific passage.

i. “More probably is the view that James was not citing a particular passage but summarizing the truth expressed in several Old Testament passages.” (Hiebert)

ii. Or it may be that Jas 4:5 speaks in two independent sentences, and that the words of **Scripture** quoted refer to what was said in Jas 4:4.

3. (6-10) *The solutions for strife: in humility, get right with God.*

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

**“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”**

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

a. **But He gives more grace:** The same Holy Spirit convicting us of our compromise will also grant us the **grace** to serve God as we should. This wonderful statement – **but He gives more grace** – stands in strong contrast to the previous words.

i. "Note that contrast; note it always. Observe how weak we are, how strong he is; how proud we are, how condescending he is; how erring we are, and how infallible he is; how changing we are, and how immutable he is; how provoking we are, and how forgiving he is. Observe how in us there is only ill, and how in him there is only good. Yet our ill but draws his goodness forth, and still he blesseth. Oh! What a rich contrast!" (Spurgeon)

ii. "Sin seeks to enter, grace shuts the door; sin tries to get the mastery, but grace, which is stronger than sin, resists, and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times, and puts its foot on our neck; grace comes to the rescue... Sin comes up like Noah's flood, but grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the ark." (Spurgeon)

iii. "Do you suffer from spiritual poverty? It is your own fault, for he giveth more grace. If you have not got it, it is not because it is not to be had, but because you have not gone for it." (Spurgeon)

b. **God resists the proud:** At the same time, James reminds us that this **grace** only comes **to the humble**.

Grace and pride are eternal enemies. Pride demands that God bless me in light of my merits, whether real or imagined. But grace will not deal with me on the basis of anything in me – good or bad – but only on the basis of who God is.

i. James used a powerful word in the phrase, **resists the proud**: “*Sets himself in battle array* against him.” (Clarke) “*God resisteth the proud, ‘setteth himself in battle-array against such,’* above all other sorts of sinner, as invaders of his territories, and foragers or plunderers of his chief treasures.” (Trapp)

c. **But gives grace to the humble**: It isn’t as if our humility *earns* the grace of God. Humility merely puts us in a position to receive the gift He freely **gives**.

d. **Therefore submit to God**: In light of the grace offered to the humble, there is only one thing to do: **submit to God**. This means to order yourself under God, to surrender to Him as a conquering King, and start receiving the benefits of His reign.

i. It is a wonder that the world does not submit to God. “I have heard much of the rights of man: but it were well also to consider the rights of God, which are the first, highest, surest, and most solemn rights in the universe, and lie at the base of all other rights... Alas, great God, how art thou a stranger even in the world which thou hast thyself made! Thy creatures, who could not see if thou hadst not given them eyes, look everywhere except to thee. Creatures who could not think if thou hadst not given them minds, think of all things except thee; and beings who could not live if thou didst not keep them in being, forget thee utterly, or if they remember thine existence, and see thy power, are foolhardy enough to become thy foes!” (Spurgeon)

ii. "If he were a tyrant it might be courageous to resist, but since he is a Father it is ungrateful to rebel." (Spurgeon) Instead, Spurgeon (in another sermon) suggested reasons why we should **submit to God**:

- We should submit to God because He created us.
- We should submit to God because His rule is good for us.
- We should submit to God because all resistance to Him is futile.
- We should submit to God because such submission is absolutely necessary to salvation.
- We should submit to God because it is the only way to have peace with God.

iii. "I desire to whisper one little truth in your ear, and I pray that it may startle you: *You are submitting even now*. You say, 'Not I; am lord of myself.' I know you think so, but all the while you are submitting to the devil. The verse before us hints at this. 'Submit yourselves unto God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' If you do not submit to God you never will resist the devil, and you will remain constantly under his tyrannical power. Which shall be your master, God or devil, for one of these must? No man is without a master." (Spurgeon)

e. **Resist the devil and he will flee from you:** To solve the problems of carnality and the strife it causes, we must also **resist the devil**. This means to stand against devil's deceptions and his efforts to intimidate. As we **resist the devil**, we are *promised* that **he will flee from you**.

- i. Significantly, James does not recommend that demons should be cast out of believers by a third

party. Instead, James simply challenges individual Christians to deal with Satan as a conquered foe who can and must be personally resisted. "He who, in the *terrible name* of JESUS, opposes even the devil himself is sure to have speedy and glorious conquest. He flees from that *name*, and from his conquering blood." (Clarke)

ii. **Resist** comes from two Greek words: *stand* and *against*. James tells us to *stand against* the devil. Satan can be set running by the resistance of the lowliest believer who comes in the authority of what Jesus did on the cross.

iii. "*Resist*, by faith, and the rest of the spiritual armour, Eph 6:13-14, etc. Or, *resist* i.e. comply not with his motions and temptations." (Poole)

iv. "*And he will flee from you*; as to that particular assault in which you resist him; and though he return again, and tempt you again, yet you still resisting, he will still be overcome; ye are never conquered so long as you do not consent." (Poole)

v. A famous ancient Christian writer named Hermas wrote, "The devil can wrestle against the Christian, but he cannot pin him." (Cited in Barclay)

f. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you:

The call to **draw near to God** is both an invitation and a promise. It is no good to submit to God's authority and to resist the devil's attack and then fail to **draw near to God**. We have it as a promise: God **will draw near to** us as we draw near to Him.

i. "When a soul sets out to seek God, God sets out to meet that soul; so that while we are drawing near to him, he is drawing near to us." (Clarke)

ii. What does it mean to **draw near to God**? Spurgeon considered a few ways:

- It means to draw near in *worship, praise, and in prayer*.
- It means to draw near by *asking counsel of God*.
- It means to draw near in *enjoying communion with God*.
- It means to draw near in *the general course and tenor of your life*.

iii. In one way, this text illustrates the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant, God told Moses to not come any closer to the burning bush and take off his shoes. Under the new covenant, God says to the sinner: "Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you." Now the ground between God and the sinner has been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and we can come close to God on the basis of that blood.

iv. This also shows *what God wants to do for the sinner*. It doesn't say, "Draw near to God and He will *save you*" or "Draw near to God and He will *forgive you*," though both of those are true. But what God really wants is to be *near* man; to have a close relationship and fellowship with the individual.

v. From the rest of the chapter we see the results of drawing near to God:

- Drawing near to God helps us to resist the devil.
- Drawing near to God helps us to become pure.
- Drawing near to God helps us to sorrow for sin.
- Drawing near to God helps us to speak well of other people.

- Drawing near to God helps us to think of eternal things.

g. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! As we draw near to God, we will be convicted of our sin. So we **lament and mourn and weep** as appropriate under the conviction of sin, and we are compelled to find cleansing at the cross.

i. "The word used for sinner is *hamartolos*, which means the hardened sinner, the man whose sin is obvious and notorious." (Barclay)

ii. In using terms like **lament and mourn and weep**, "James speaks in terms of the Hebrew prophets' language about the anguish of repentance." (Moffatt)

h. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up: As we come as sinners before the holy God (not as self righteous religionists, as Jesus explained in Luk 18:10-14), we appropriately **humble** ourselves before Him. Then He will **lift** us **up**, because *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*, and grace - the unmerited favor of God - always lifts us up.

i. In this passage James has powerfully described both the *duty* and the *blessing* of repentance.

4. (11-12) *The solutions for strife: get right with other people.*

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

a. **Do not speak evil of one another:** Humbling ourselves and getting right with God *must* result in our getting right with other people. When we are right with other people, it will show in the way we talk about them. So we must **not speak evil of one another** and not judge our brother.

i. **Speak evil** translates the ancient Greek word *katalalia*. "*Katalalia* is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves." (Barclay)

ii. This sin is wrong for two reasons. First, it breaks the royal law that we should love one another. Second, it takes a right of judgment that only God has.

b. **He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law:** When we judge our brother, we put ourselves in the same place as the law, in effect judging the law. This is something that we have no authority to do, because **there is one Lawgiver** - so **who are you to judge another?**

i. "However high and orthodox our view of God's law might be, a failure actually to do it says to the world that we do not *in fact* put much store by it." (Moo)

c. **Who are you to judge another?** This is an extension of the same humility that James writes about in this chapter. When we have proper humility before God, it just isn't within us to arrogantly judge our brother.

i. "This is not to rule out civil courts and judges. Instead, it is to root out the harsh, unkind, critical

spirit that continually finds fault with others.”
(Burdick)

ii. “*Who art thou; what a sorry creature, a man, a worm, that thou shouldest lift up thyself into God’s place, and make thyself a judge of one not subject to thee!*” (Poole)

B. A humble dependence on God.

1. (13-16) *A caution against an attitude of independence from God.*

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

a. **You who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”:** James rebuked the kind of heart that lives and makes its plans apart from a constant awareness of the hand of God, and with an underestimation of our own limitations (**you do not know what will happen tomorrow**).

i. “This was the custom of those ancient times; they traded from city to city, carrying their goods on the backs of camels. The Jews traded thus to *Tyre, Sidon, Caesarea, Crete, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome, &c.* And it is to this kind of itinerant mercantile life that St. James alludes.” (Clarke)

ii. This attitude that James challenged goes far beyond making wise plans for the future. “Not, let us

go, but, *we will go*, in the indicative mood; noting the peremptoriness of their purposes, and their presuming upon future times and things, which were not in their power.” (Poole)

iii. “Notice, that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objects. What did they say? Did they determine with each other ‘We will to-day or to-morrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of his kingdom’? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end!” (Spurgeon)

iv. “There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass – one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know.” (Spurgeon)

b. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away:

James asked us to consider the fragility of human life, and the fact that we live and move only at the permission of God. James does not discourage us from planning and doing, only from planning and doing *apart from* reliance on God.

i. The idea that our life was a **vapor** or shadow was a frequent figure of speech in the Old Testament (Psa 102:11; Job 8:9; 1Ch 29:15).

ii. We also remember the story Jesus told about the rich man who made his great plans for the future, and foolishly lost it all when his soul was required of him (Luk 12:16-21). “They might easily observe that many things fall out betwixt the cup and the lip, betwixt the chin and the chalice.” (Trapp)

iii. “There are a thousand gates to death; and, though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have

passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape stone, killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all." (Spurgeon)

iv. Knowing that life is short, we must be diligent and energetic about the common duties of everyday life. *"It is sinful to neglect the common duties of life, under the idea that we shall do something more by-and-by. You do not obey your parents, young man, and yet you are going to be a minister, are you? A pretty minister will you make! As an apprentice you are very dilatory and neglectful, and your master would be glad to see the back of you; he wishes that he could burn your indentures; and yet you have an idea you are going to be a missionary, I believe? A pretty missionary you would be!"* (Spurgeon)

c. **Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."** It is nothing but sheer **arrogance** that makes us think that we can live and move and have our being independent of God. This boastful **arrogance** is the essence of sin: a proud independence, the root of all sin, as was the case with Lucifer (Isa 14:12-15) and Adam (Gen 3:5-7).

i. Paul knew and lived this principle: *I will return again to you, God willing (Act 18:21). But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills (1Co 4:19). I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits (1Co 16:7).*

ii. **"All such boasting**, when life is so precarious, is worse than absurd, it is **wicked**, a positive sin, a specimen of the ungodly haughtiness (Jas 4:6) of which men should repent." (Moffatt)

iii. **You boast in your arrogance:** “The word is *alazoneia*. *Alazoneia* was originally the characteristic of the wandering quack. He offered cures which were no cures and boasted to things that he was not able to do.” (Moffatt)

2. (17) *A challenge to live according to what we know in the Lord.*

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

a. **To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin:** James knows that it is far easier to *think about* and *talk about* humility and dependence on God than it is to live it. Yet he makes the mind of God plain: as we know these things, we are accountable to *do them*.

i. Here James returned to his consistent theme through his letter: the idea that genuine faith is proved by action. “However high and orthodox our view of God’s law might be, a failure actually to do it says to the world that we do not *in fact* put much store by it.” (Moo)

ii. Yet we also see that the uncertainty of life, to which James referred to in the previous passage, should not create fear that makes one passive or inactive. The uncertainty of life should make us ready to recognize what is **good** and then **do it**. “This uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or inaction. It is always a reason for realizing our complete dependence on God.” (Moffatt)

b. **To him it is sin:** Jesus told a story with much the same point in Luk 12:41-48. The story was about servants and how they obeyed the master in the master’s absence. Jesus concluded the story with this

application: *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more (Luk 12:48).*
Greater light gives greater responsibility.

Warning to the Rich

Jas 5:1 Come now, rich ones, weep, howling over your hardships coming on.

Jas 5:2 Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten.

Jas 5:3 Your gold and silver have rusted over, and their poison will be a testimony to you, and will eat your flesh as fire. You heaped treasure in the last days.

Jas 5:4 Behold, the wages of the workmen who have reaped your fields cry out, being kept back by you. And the cries of the ones who have reaped have entered "into the ears of the Lord of Hosts." Isa. 5:9

Jas 5:5 You lived luxuriously on the earth, and lived in self gratification; you nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter;

Jas 5:6 you condemned; you murdered the righteous; he does not resist you.

Patience in Suffering

Jas 5:7 Therefore, brothers, be long-suffering until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being long-suffering over it until it may receive the early and the latter rain.

Jas 5:8 You also be long-suffering. Set your hearts firmly, because the coming of the Lord has drawn near.

Jas 5:9 Do not murmur against one another, brothers, that you not be condemned. Behold, the Judge stands before the door.

Jas 5:10 My brothers, as an example of suffering ill, and of longsuffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of

the Lord.

Jas 5:11 Behold, we call those blessed who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you saw the end of the Lord, "that the Lord is full of tender mercy and pity."

Psa. 103:8

Jas 5:12 But before all things, my brothers, do not swear, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor any other oath. But let your yes be yes, and the no, no, that you may not fall under judgment.

The Prayer of Faith

Jas 5:13 Does anyone suffer ill among you? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him praise in song.

Jas 5:14 Is any among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Jas 5:15 And the prayer of faith will cure those being sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he may have committed sin, it will be forgiven him.

Jas 5:16 Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous one has great strength, having been made effective.

Jas 5:17 Elijah was a man of like feeling to us, and he prayed in prayer for it not to rain; and it did not rain on the earth three years and six months.

Jas 5:18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to sprout.

Jas 5:19 If anyone among you goes astray from the truth, brothers, and anyone turns him back,

Jas 5:20 know that the one turning a sinner from the error of his way will save the soul from death, and will hide a multitude of sins.

James 5:1-20

James 5 - The Life of a Living Faith

A. A rebuke of the ungodly rich.

1. (1-3) *The rich and the illusion of wealth.*

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

a. **Come now, you rich:** James had developed the idea of the need for complete dependence on God. He now naturally rebuked those most likely to live independently from God – the **rich**.

i. While Jesus counted some **rich** persons among His followers (such as Zaccheus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Barnabas), we are compelled to observe that riches do present an additional and significant obstacle to the kingdom (Mat 19:23-24). It is also true that the pursuit of riches is a motivation for every conceivable sin (1Ti 6:10).

ii. "He speaks to them not simply as rich (for riches and grace sometimes may go together) but as wicked, not only wallowing in wealth, but abusing it to pride, luxury, oppression, and cruelty." (Poole)

b. **Weep and howl:** In the style of an Old Testament prophet, James tells the rich to mourn in consideration of their destiny (the **miseries that are coming upon you**). In the life to come, their riches will be revealed as **corrupted, moth-eaten** and **corroded**.

i. James probably refers to the destruction of three kinds of wealth. Stores of food are **corrupted** (rotted), **garments are moth-eaten**, and **gold and**

silver are corroded. Each one of them comes to nothing in their own way.

ii. "More than that, James adds, with a Dantesque touch of horror, **the rust will devour** (or corrode) **your flesh like fire**, you are so bound up with your greedy gains; your wealth perishes and you perish with it and by it, eaten away in burning pain." (Moffatt)

iii. "Better weep here, where there are wiping handkerchiefs in the hand of Christ, than to have your eyes whipped out in hell. Better howl with men than yell with devils." (Trapp)

c. **Will be a witness against you:** The corruptible nature of the wealth of the rich will **witness against** them. On the day of judgment it will be revealed that they have lived their lives in the arrogant independence James previously condemned, heaping up earthly **treasure in the last days**, when they should have been heaping up treasure in heaven (Luk 18:22).

i. **In the last days:** "The doom is depicted in highly coloured Jewish phrases, and the same immediate prospect of the End is held out as a threat to the rich and as a consolation to the oppressed poor." (Moffatt)

2. (4-6) The sins of the rich are condemned.

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

a. **The wages of the laborers... you kept back by fraud:** They had withheld **the wages of** their **laborers**.

They lived indulgently without regard for others (as the man in Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus, Luk 16:19-31). They had condemned and murdered from their position of power.

i. "Deferring payment is a sort of defrauding, as it bereaves the creditor of the benefit of improvement; and so they are taxed here with injustice, as well as covetousness, in that they lived upon other men's labours, and starved the poor to enrich themselves." (Poole)

b. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth: The title **Lord of Sabaoth** in Jas 5:4 should not be confused with the similar title *Lord of the Sabbath* (used in Mar 2:28 and Luk 6:5). Instead it is a translation of the idea behind the Hebrew term *Lord of Hosts* (compare Rom 9:29 with Isa 1:9), which means "the Lord of armies," especially in the sense of heavenly and angelic armies. It describes God as the warrior, the commander-in-chief of all heavenly armies.

i. The use of this title was meant to give these unjust reach a sober warning. The cries of the people they had oppressed had come to the ears of the God who commands heavenly armies; the God of might and power and judgment.

ii. "The primary reference is to Yahweh as the God of hosts or the armies of Israel and later the hosts of heaven. The rabbis rarely use the title, but Exo 3:6 connects it with Yahweh's war against injustice." (Adamson)

iii. This is "a frequent appellation of God in the Old Testament; and signifies his uncontrollable power, and the infinitely numerous means he has for governing the world, and defending his followers, and punishing the wicked." (Clarke)

c. **You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you:** Often those who are poor and without power in this world have little satisfaction from justice. Yet God hears their cries, and He is the one who guarantees to ultimately right every wrong and answer every injustice.

i. **Condemned... you have murdered the just:**
"Take it either properly, or metaphorically of usurers and extortioners, that not only rob, but ravish the poor that are fallen into their nets." (Trapp)

B. A call for patient endurance in light of the coming judgment.

1. (7-8) *Imitate the patient endurance of the farmer.*

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

a. **Therefore be patient, brethren:** James brought the issue of the ultimate judgment before us in his remarks about the ungodly rich and their destiny. Now he calls Christians (especially those enduring hardship) to patiently endure **until the coming of the Lord**.

i. "James stirs no class-feeling, e.g. of labourers against their unjust employers; leave the wealthy oppressors to God's imminent vengeance on their cruelty." (Moffatt)

ii. "Sometimes, indeed, the very hope of the coming of the Lord has seemed to increase impatience rather than patience... Oh, to be patient in fellowship with God!" (Morgan)

b. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently: A farmer does not give up when his crop does not come to harvest immediately. He keeps on working even when the crop cannot be seen at all. Even so Christians must work hard and exercise patient endurance even when the harvest day seems far away.

i. As James instructs us, we are to wait upon God and not lose heart. "A man to whom it is given to wait for a reward keeps up his courage, and when he has to wait, he says, 'It is no more than I expected. I never reckoned that I was to slay my enemy at the first blow. I never imagined that I was to capture the city as soon as ever I had digged the first trench; I reckoned upon waiting, and now that is come, I find that God gives me the grace to fight on and wrestle on, till the victory shall come.' And patience saves a man from a great deal of haste and folly." (Spurgeon)

ii. When we think about it, the waiting and need for endurance we have in the Christian life is very much like the waiting of the farmer.

- He waits with a reasonable hope and expectation of reward.
- He waits a long time.
- He waits working all the while.
- He waits depending on things out of his own power; with his eye on the heavens.
- He waits despite changing circumstances and many uncertainties.
- He waits encouraged by the value of the harvest.
- He waits encouraged by the work and harvest of others.

- He waits because he really has no other option.
- He waits because it does no good to give up.
- He waits aware of how the seasons work.
- He waits because as time goes on, it becomes more important and not less to do so.

c. **Until it receives the early and latter rain:** The pictures of the **early and latter rain** should be taken literally as James intends. He refers to the early rains (coming in late October or early November) that were essential to soften the ground for plowing, and to the latter rains (coming in late April or May) which were essential to the maturing of the crops shortly before harvest. There is no allegorical picture *here* of an early and a latter outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church.

i. The Bible does explain that there will be a significant outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days (Joe 2:28-29, Act 2:17-18); but this passage from James doesn't seem to be relevant to that outpouring.

ii. Instead, the sense here is more as Moffatt explains: "The farmer had to wait for this rainfall twice in the year; but although he could do nothing to bring it, he did not lose heart, provided that he was obeying the will of his God."

d. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand:** The soon return of Jesus requires that we have *established* hearts, hearts that are rooted in Jesus and His eternal resolution of all things.

i. "When God shall give you a rich return for all you have done for him, you will blush to think you ever doubted; you will be ashamed to think you ever grew weary in his service. You shall have your reward. Not tomorrow, so wait: not the next day perhaps, so be

patient. You may be full of doubts one day, your joys sink low. It may be rough windy weather with you in your spirit. You may even doubt whether you are the Lord's, but if you have rested in the name of Jesus, if by the grace of God you are what you are, if he is all your salvation, and all your desire, — have patience; have patience, for the reward will surely come in God's good time." (Spurgeon)

e. **For the coming of the Lord is at hand:** There is a real sense in which **the coming of the Lord** was **at hand** in the days of James as well as in our own day today. One might say that since the Ascension of Jesus, history has been brought to the brink of consummation and now runs parallel along side the edge of the brink, with the

coming of the Lord... at hand.

2. (9) *Practicing patient endurance among God's people.*

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

a. **Do not grumble against one another:** Times of hardship can cause us to be less than loving with our Christian brothers and sisters. James reminds us that we cannot become grumblers and complainers in our hardship - lest we **be condemned** even in our hardship.

b. **Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!** Jesus comes as a **Judge**, not only to judge the world, but also to assess the faithfulness of Christians (2Co 5:10). In light of this, we cannot allow hardship to make us unloving towards each other.

3. (10-11) *Following examples of patient endurance.*

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and

patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by the Lord*—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

a. Take the prophets... as an example of suffering and patience: James reminds us that the prophets of the Old Testament endured hardship, yet practiced patient endurance. We can take them as examples.

i. Among these **prophets**, Jeremiah is one example of someone who endured mistreatment with patience. He was put in the stocks (Jer 20:2), thrown into prison (Jer 32:2), and lowered into miry dungeon (Jer 28:6). Yet he persisted in his ministry.

ii. "As much as God honoured and loved them, yet they were not exempted from afflictions, but were maligned, traduced, and persecuted by men, 1Ki 18:13; 1Ki 19:14; 2Ki 6:31; Amo 7:10; Hebrews 11; and therefore when they suffered such hard things, it is no shame for you to suffer the like, Mat 5:12." (Poole)

b. You have heard of the perseverance of Job: James essentially tells us three things about Job and why he is a significant example for the suffering Christian.

i. First we see the **perseverance of Job**. Passages such as Job 1:20-22 show us the tremendous **perseverance** of this afflicted man, who refused to curse God despite his severe and mysterious suffering.

ii. We see also **the end intended by the Lord**, speaking of the ultimate goal and purpose of God in allowing the suffering to come upon Job. Perhaps the greatest **end intended by the Lord** was to use Job as a lesson to angelic beings, even as God promises to

use the church (Eph 3:10-11). When we understand that God has a good purpose, even painful things are put into different perspective. "If a man were to attack me with a knife I would resist him with all my strength, and count it a tragedy if he succeeded. Yet if a surgeon comes to me with a knife, I welcome both him and the knife; let him cut me open, even wider than the knife-attacker, because I know his purpose is good and necessary." (Spurgeon)

iii. We see further **that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful**. This is not immediately apparent in the story of Job; we can quickly think that God was *cruel* to Job. Yet upon consideration, we can see that God was indeed **very compassionate and merciful**.

- God was **very compassionate and merciful** to Job because He only allowed suffering for a *very good reason*.
- God was **very compassionate and merciful** to Job because He *restricted* what Satan could do against Job.
- God was **very compassionate and merciful** to Job because He *sustained* Him with His unseen hand through all his suffering.
- God was **very compassionate and merciful** to Job because in the whole process God *used* Satan himself. At the end of it all, God had accomplished something wonderful: To make Job a *better* and more *blessed* man than ever. Remember that as good as Job was at the beginning of the book, he was a *better man* at the end of it. He was better in character, humbler, and more blessed than before.

iv. "And when we come to look all Job's life through, we see that *the Lord in mercy brought him out of it all with unspeakable advantage*. He who tested with one hand supported with the other. Whatever Satan's end might be in tempting the patriarch, God had an end which covered and compassed that of the destroyer, and that end was answered all along the line, from the first loss which happened among the oxen to the last taunt of his three accusers." (Spurgeon)

v. **That the Lord is very compassionate:** "I wish we could all read the original Greek; for this word, 'The Lord is very pitiful,' is a specially remarkable one. It means literally that the Lord hath 'many bowels,' or a great heart, and so it indicates great tenderness." (Spurgeon)

4. (12) *An exhortation in light of the coming judgment before Jesus.*

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

a. **Do not swear:** Many Jewish people in the time James wrote made distinctions between "binding oaths" and "non-binding oaths." Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of "crossing your fingers behind your back" when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned.

i. The Bible does not forbid the swearing of all oaths, only against the swearing of deceptive, unwise, or flippant oaths. On occasion God Himself swears oaths (such as in Luk 1:73, Heb 3:11, and Heb 6:13).

ii. "All swearing is not forbidden, any more than Mat 5:34; (for oaths are made use of by holy men in both the Old and New Testament, Gen 21:23-24; Gen 24:3; Gen 26:28; 1Ki 17:1-2; 2Co 1:23; Gal 1:20; and the use of an oath is permitted and approved of by God himself, Psa 15:4; Heb 6:16) but such oaths are false, rash, vain, without just cause, or customary and frequent in ordinary discourse." (Poole)

b. **Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath:** James again echoed the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:34-37). The need to swear or make oaths, beyond a simple and clear **yes** or **no** betrays the weakness of one's word. It demonstrates that there is not enough weight in one's own character to confirm their words.

c. **Lest you fall into judgment:** This lack of character will be exposed at the judgment seat of Christ. This motivates us all the more to prepare for that judgment by our speaking with integrity.

i. This admonition may seem out of context to us. Yet, "Probably James jotted it down as an after-thought, to emphasize the warning of Jas 5:9; in excitement or irritation there was a temptation to curse and swear violently and profanely." (Moffatt)

C. Exhortations for Christians to care for one another.

1. (13-14) How to meet needs arising among Christians.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

a. **Is anyone among you suffering?** The **suffering** need to pray, the **cheerful** should **sing psalms** of praise to God, and the **sick** should call for the elders of the church, asking them to pray for their need.

i. Instead of *complaining* (as in the previous verse), the sufferer should **pray**. "Instead of murmuring **against one another** (Jas 5:9), or complaining peevishly, or breaking out into curses, pray to God." (Moffatt)

ii. James has the same advice for both the **suffering** one and the **cheerful** one: take it all to the Lord. In fact, the two commands could be reversed: sufferers should **sing** also, and the cheerful should also **pray**.

iii. "Elsewhere in the N.T. the word **to sing praise** refers to public worship, and always, if the usage in classical Greek and Greek O.T. be decisive, to songs with a musical accompaniment." (Moffatt)

iv. James clearly set the initiative on the person in need: **let him call**. The hesitancy of people to ask for or to seek prayer from the leadership of the church in such circumstances is a true mystery.

b. **Let them pray over him:** James also said that the **elders of the church**, as they pray, should anoint the sick person **with oil in the name of the Lord**. This **anointing with oil** has been interpreted as either seeking the best medical attention possible for the afflicted (oil massages were considered medicinal), or as an emblem of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

i. **Anointing** the sick **with oil** is also mentioned in Mar 6:13. Luk 10:34 mentions the application of oil in a medicinal sense. "The efficacy of olive oil as a medical agent was well known." (Hiebert) According to Burdick, the word for **anoint** here is not the usual

one used in the New Testament, but has more of a medicinal meaning to it.

ii. “*Oil* was and is frequently used in the east as a means of cure in very dangerous diseases; and in Egypt it is often used in the cure of the *plague*. Even in Europe it has been tried with great success in the cure of *dropsy*. And *pure olive oil* is excellent for recent wounds and bruises; and I have seen it tried in this way with the best effects... St. James desires them to use *natural means* while looking to God for an especial blessing. And no wise man would direct otherwise.” (Clarke)

iii. The Roman Catholic Church mutated this command to anoint the sick into the “sacrament” of Extreme Unction, administered to someone to prepare that one for death. Something James intended to heal was made into a preparation for death!

2. (15-16) *God’s answer to the prayers of His people.*

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

a. **And the prayer of faith will save the sick:** Many have wondered if James guarantees healing here for the sick who are prayed for in **faith**. Some interpret this as a reference to ultimate resurrection. The reference to sins being **forgiven** adds to the idea that James is considering a spiritual work and healing, not necessarily a physical healing.

i. Yet the context of the statement demands that James does not *exclude* physical healing as an answer

to prayer, though he does seem to mean something broader than *only* a physical healing. We should pray for others in **faith**, expecting that God will heal them, then leave the matter in God's hands.

ii. Clearly, God does not grant immediate healing for every **prayer of faith**, and the reasons are hidden in the heart and mind of God. Still, many are not healed simply because there is no **prayer of faith** offered. The best approach in praying for the sick is to pray with humble confidence that they will be healed, unless God clearly and powerfully makes it clear that this is not His will. Having prayed, we simply leave the matter to God.

iii. Often we do not pray the **prayer of faith** out of concern for God's reputation if there should be no healing. We should remember that God is big enough to handle His own reputation.

b. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed:

James reminds us that mutual confession and prayer brings healing, both physically and spiritually. Confession can free us from the heavy burdens (physically and spiritually) of unresolved sin, and removes hindrances to the work of the Holy Spirit.

i. **To one another:** Confession to another in the body of Christ is essential because sin will demand to have us to itself, isolated from all others. Confession breaks the power of secret sin. Yet, confession need not be made to a "priest" or any imagined mediator; we simply confess **to one another** as appropriate. Confession is good, but must be made with discretion. An unwise confession of sin can be the cause of more sin.

ii. Clarke observes that if this passage actually refers to the Roman Catholic practice of the confessional, then the priest should likewise confess his sins to the people. He also adds: "There is no instance in *auricular confession* where the *penitent* and the *priest* pray together for pardon; but here the people are commanded to pray for each other that they may be healed." (Clarke)

iii. Noting from the context, sin should especially be confessed where physical healing is necessary. It is possible - though by no means always the case - that a person's sickness is the direct result of some sin that has not been dealt with, as Paul describes in 1Co 11:30.

iv. Hiebert on **confess**: "The root form means literally *to say the same thing*; hence, it means that in confession sin we agree to identify it by its true name and admit that it is sin."

v. "Now, in the primitive church this was openly done as a rule, before the congregation. The earliest manual of the church practice prescribes: 'you must confess your sins in church, and not betake yourself to prayer with a bad conscience' (*Didache* iv.)." (Moffatt)

vi. The great conviction of sin and subsequent confession of sin is common during times of spiritual awakening. There is really nothing unusual about confession during Revival. Finney - a great apostle of Revival - urged it and described it. In the North China revivals under Jonathan Goforth, confession was almost invariably the prelude to blessing; one writer describing the significant Korean revivals associated with Goforth wrote: "*We may have our theories of the desirability or undesirability of public confession of*

sin. I have had mine, but I know that when the Spirit of God falls upon guilty souls, there will be confession, and no power on earth can stop it.” (from Calling to Remembrance by William Newton Blair)

vii. Public confession of sin has the potential for great good or bad. Some guiding principles can help.

- *Confession should be made to the one sinned against.* “Most Christians display a preference for confession in secret before God, even concerning matters which involve other people. To confess to God seems to them to be the easiest way out. If offenders were really conscious of the presence of God, even secret confession of private sin would have a good effect. Alas, most offenders merely commune with themselves instead of making contact with God, who refuses their prayers under certain conditions. In the words of our Lord, it is clear that sin involving another person should be confessed to that person.” (Orr)

- *Confession should often be public.* Jas 5:16 illustrates this principle. A.T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar, says that in Jas 5:16 the odd tense of the Greek verb **confess** in this verse implies group confession rather than private confession. It is confession “ones to others” not “one to one other.”

- *Public confession must be discrete.* Often the confession needs to be no more than what is necessary to enlist prayer. It can be enough to say publicly, “Pray for me, I need victory over my besetting sin.” It would be wrong to go into more detail, but saying this much is important. It keeps us from being “let’s pretend Christians” who act as if everything is fine when it isn’t. “Almost all sexual transgressions are either secret or private and should be so confessed. A burden too great to bear may be

shared with a pastor or doctor or a friend of the same sex. Scripture discourages even the naming of immorality among believers, and declares that it is a shame even to speak of things done in secret by the immoral." (Orr)

- *Distinguish between secret sins and those which directly affect others.* Orr gives a good principle: "If you sin secretly, confess secretly, admitting publicly that you need the victory but keeping details to yourself. If you sin openly confess openly to remove stumbling blocks from those whom you have hindered. If you have sinned spiritually (prayerlessness, lovelessness, and unbelief as well as their offspring, criticism, etc.) then confess to the church that you have been a hindrance." (J. Edwin Orr)

- *Confession is often made to people, but before God.* At the same time, we notice that James says **confess your trespasses to one another**. One of the interesting things about confession of sin as I have noticed it in the writings of J. Edwin Orr is that the confessions are almost always addressed to *people*, not to *God*. It isn't that you confess your sin to God and others merely hear. You confess your sin before others and ask them to pray for you to get it right before God.

- *Confession should be appropriately specific.* When open confession of sin is appropriate - more than the public stating of spiritual need, but confessing open sin or sin against the church - it must be *specific*. "If I made any mistakes I'm sorry" is no confession of sin at all. You sinned specifically, so confess specifically. "It costs nothing for a church member to admit in a prayer meeting: 'I am not what I ought to be.' It costs

no more to say: 'I ought to be a better Christian.' It costs something to say: 'I have been a trouble-maker in this church.' It costs something to say: 'I have had bitterness of heart towards certain leaders, to whom I shall definitely apologise.'" (Orr, *Full Surrender*)

- *Confession should be thorough.* "Some confessions are not thorough. They are too general. They are not made to the persons concerned. They neglect completely the necessary restitution. Or they make no provision for a different course of conduct in which the sin is forsaken. They are endeavours for psychological relief." (Orr)

- *Confession must have honesty and integrity.* If we confess with no real intention of battling the sin, our confession isn't thorough and it mocks God. The story is told of an Irishman who confessed to his priest that he had stolen two bags of potatoes. The priest had heard the gossip around town and said to the man, "Mike, I heard it was only one bag of potatoes stolen from the market." The Irishman replied, "That's true Father, but it was so easy that I plan on taking another tomorrow night." *By all means, avoid phony confession - confession without true brokenness or sorrow. If it isn't deeply real, it isn't any good.*

- *One need not fear that public confession of sin will inevitably get out of hand.* Orr tells of a time when a woman was overwrought by deep sorrow for sin and became hysterical. He saw the danger immediately and told her, "Quiet, sister. Turn your eyes on Jesus." She did and the danger of extreme emotion was avoided.

- *Those who hear a confession of sin also have a great responsibility.* Those who hear the confession should have the proper response: loving, intercessory

prayer, and not human wisdom, gossiping, or “sharing” the need with others.

viii. According to Moffatt, the English Prayer Book, before the communion service, the minister is to give this invitation: “Come to me or to some other discreet and learned minister of God’s Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God’s holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution.” There can be great value to *opening one’s grief*.

ix. Real, deep, genuine confession of sin has been a feature of every genuine awakening or revival in the past 250 years. But it isn’t anything new, as demonstrated by the revival in Ephesus recorded in Act 19:17-20. It says, *many who believed came confessing and telling their deeds*. This was *Christians* getting right with God, and open confession was part of it.

c. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much: In writing about the need for prayer for the suffering, for the sick, and for the sinning, James points to the **effective** nature of prayer - when it is **fervent** and offered by a **righteous man**.

i. The idea of **fervent** in this context is *strong*. “It might be rendered literally: ‘Very strong is the supplication of a righteous man, energizing.’” (Meyer)

ii. “When such a power of prayer is granted, faith should be immediately called into exercise, that the blessing may be given: the spirit of prayer is the proof that the power of God is present to heal. *Long prayers* give no particular evidence of *Divine inspiration*.” (Clarke)

iii. Much of our prayer is not effective simply because it is not **fervent**. It is offered with a lukewarm

attitude that virtually asks God to care about something that we care little about. Effective prayer must be

fervent, not because we must emotionally persuade a reluctant God, but because we must gain God's heart by being **fervent** for the things He is **fervent** for.

iv. Additionally, effective prayer is offered by a **righteous man**. This is someone who recognizes the grounds of his righteousness reside in Jesus, and whose personal walk is generally consistent with the righteousness that he has in Jesus.

v. **Avails much**: "It was so with John Knox, whose prayers were more dreaded by Mary of Scots than the armies of Philip." (Meyer)

3. (17-18) Elijah as an example of answered prayer.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

a. **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours**: Elijah is a model of earnest prayer that was answered by God. His effectiveness in prayer extended even to the weather! Yet this shows that Elijah's heart was in tune with God's. He prayed for the rain to stop and start only because he sensed it was in the heart of God in His dealings with Israel.

b. **Prayed earnestly**: Literally, this is *prayed with prayer*. To truly pray, by definition, is to pray **earnestly**.

i. "*He prayed with prayer*; a Hebraism for, he *prayed fervently*." (Clarke)

c. **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours:** This being true, we then can be men with the power of prayer like him.

4. (19-20) Helping a sinning brother.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

a. **If anyone among you wanders from the truth:**

Having introduced the topics of sin and confession, James reminds us of the need to confront those who have wandered from the truth. **Wanders from the truth** is a good picture. Most people don't wander deliberately - it just sort of happens. Nonetheless, it still gets them off track and possibly in danger.

i. "Read the verse and you will see that it was that of a backslider from the visible church of God. The words, 'If any of you,' must refer to a professed Christian." (Spurgeon)

b. **And someone turns him back:** This shows us that God uses human instruments in turning sinners back from the errors of their ways. God does not need to use such human instruments, and sometimes He does not. The Apostle Paul – or rather, Saul of Tarsus – was not converted through any human instrument, save perhaps the prayers of the dying martyr Stephen for him. Yet no one preached to him, but Jesus decided to meet him directly.

i. One reason God uses human instruments is because it brings Him *more* glory than if He were to do His work by Himself. In this way God is like a skilled workman who makes incredible things using

the *worst* of tools. After the same pattern, God uses earthen vessels to be containers of His glory.

ii. "Most persons have been convinced by the pious conversation of sisters, by the holy example of mothers, by the minister, by the Sabbath-school, or by the reading of tracts or perusing Scripture. Let us not therefore believe that God will often work without instruments; let us not sit down silently and say, 'God will do his own work.' It is quite true he will; but then he does his work by using his children as instruments." (Spurgeon)

iii. Along this line, can we not say that when we refuse to make ourselves available to God's service – weak and failing as we are – we in fact *rob* Him of some of His glory? He can glorify Himself through a weak vessel like you; you should let Him do it.

iv. "It may not appear so brilliant a thing to bring back a backslider as to reclaim a harlot or a drunkard, but in the sight of God it is no small miracle of grace, and to the instrument who has performed it shall yield no small comfort. Seek ye, then, my brethren, those who were of us but have gone from us; seek ye those who linger still in the congregation but have disgraced the church, and are put away from us, and rightly so, because we cannot countenance their uncleanness; seek them with prayers, and tears, and entreaties, if peradventure God may grant them repentance that they may be saved." (Spurgeon)

c. He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins: There is a blessing for the one who loves his brother enough to confront him, and who turns him from **the error of his way**. He has saved that **soul from death** and covered **a multitude of sins**.

i. This speaks powerfully of the *restoration* that is possible for those who have sinned. "I know of men of good standing in the gospel ministry, who, ten years ago, fell into sin; and that is thrown in our teeth to this very day. Do you speak of them? You are at once informed, 'Why, ten years ago they did so-and-so.' Brethren, Christian men ought to be ashamed of themselves for taking notice of such things so long afterwards. True, we may use more caution in our dealings; but to reproach a fallen brother for what he did so long ago, is contrary to the spirit of John, who went after Peter, three days after he had denied his Master with oaths and curses." (Spurgeon)

ii. James concludes with this because this is exactly what he has endeavored to do through this challenging letter - to confront those who have wandered from a living faith, endeavoring to save their souls from death, by demanding that they not only hear the word, but do it, because a living faith will have its proof.

iii. "So the homily ends - abruptly, even more abruptly than the First Epistle of John, without any closing word of farewell to the readers, abruptly but not ineffectively. The Wisdom writings on which it is modeled end as suddenly." (Moffatt)